Live Till Tomorrow

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TO

Elnore

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IT WAS still dark outside a cold early morning February darkness The operating room was empty when Dr Sirbu entered but somebody had already turned on the lights and started the hissing sterilizer brought in the fresh packs of sheets towels and gauze sponges and now the room was ready brightly eager for the business of the day

Yet the day seemed to him—Nicholas Sirbu twenty five first year resident in anaesthesia—a continuation of his dreams Waking and sleeping tossing on his bed he felt that he had dwelt all night long in this room. Since by no stretch of the imagination could he *arrive at getting Petra to his room it was here in this gleaming* white-tiled room under the brightly focused and mingled beams of surgical lights that he dreamed he took her in his arms and held her struggling and fighting against him It was here that he had won over her in his dreams made her his woman and bound her irrevocably to his life Petra I ll call her Petra when she comes in, he thought I ll call her Petra to her face Everyone calls her Petra It sounds funny when I say Dr Petrie

He heard a step in the corridor Was it she? No it was the student nurse Betty coming with the teapot to draw boiling water from the sterilizer Will you have some tea Dr Sirbu? she said, coming close to him and looking up at him turning her face to him because he was so tall and she was plump and short. We are having tea in the dressing room You can come in if you want.

He glanced at the clock Not quite seven thirty He was early Dr Takkes the chief surgeon was unpredictable lately When he had come in to watch surgery as a clerk and medical student, Takkes was always *on time even before the hour He demanded military* exactness of his surgical teams He was a martinet, a dictator but

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passionately that this was the only one for him Sirbu Nicholas twenty five, Doctor of Medicine now cast as The Anaesthetist.

gaping subway mouth. The rushing mass had thinned down to a trickle a few individuals running desperately to beat the time clock. It was eight past eight o clock He turned away from the window Damn he thought where the hell are they?

Betty had come in again, singing softly to herself under the mask while she undid with gloved hands the sterile sheeted armamentarium of surgery and arranged it neatly in gleaming rows on the instrument table

Where s the patient Nick? she said.

He shrugged Outside I had he sent down when I came in half an hour ago She must be outside bound and gagged and tied to her cart

I wish they wouldn t leave them like that in the halls she said It must be awful to wait like that unable to scratch one s nose even Alone

They have nothing else to do said Nick but the doctor Betty the doctor must not wait. Every minute he waits takes the bread out of his children s mouths Money not made is money lost

Go on get her Make eyes at her while I get everything ready she said. Give her a thrill

Oh no he said It s too close to the heart Betty I m not taking a *chance on g ving her palpitations* He picked up the woman s X ray and clamped it on the illuminated view box

Betty stood bes de him What do you see? she asked What is wrong with her? It s an anomaly of the aorta, he said See that blind pouch that comes off it here to the left of it? Like a

enough left for the rest of the body Other ood vessels feed

whole chest cavity And it s not a very big chest.

Her circulation must be all messed up then said Betty

Not only that he said but it s likely to rupture. And that rings the bell every time I read about it last night Most of the heart books were signed out to Stull though. It looks as though he wanted to do the job instead of the old man

I hope he doesn t said Betty I don t like him

Ditto

He snapped off the view box light and went out into the hall threading his way among the procession of laden white-covered carts The surgical patients having received preliminary sedatives were quiet their eyes covered by a folded towel their charts sticking out from under rubber covered mattresses He pulled them out one by one Dolen Dr Carter prostate Mansfield Dr Schmidt parotid Jukosky Dr Barradian clavicle Smithfield Dr Judd hysterectomy Rossini Dr McMillan haemorrhoids Watanabe where was Watanabe Taikkes-Stull aneurysm? Morgenstiern Dr Skazach burn dressings Morgenstiern his mouth open and without teeth was snoring

An orderly came to Nick looking over his shoulder at the name on the chart My patient he said Let s go Nick helped him disengage the cart from the tight parking against the wall and Morgenstiern was wheeled away

He followed the cart absently a little while twice passing the cart where the slender Oriental woman was lying her eyes covered looking much like a child the delicate body hardly swelling the outline of the cover and Nick, glancing at her did not stop He paced through the corridor looking for her with his eyes but his mind and his will taut toward Petra She wasn t in the scrub room she wasn t in the office She was in none of the other operating theatres where she might have dropped in waiting for Taikkes

room she wasn t watching Dr Judd she wasn t with Barradian in

what s that to you you punk? What can she possibly mean to you what can you possibly mean to her?

He passed the visitors lounge where the relatives of the opera

forward the bla k smiling

man raised his head and Nick saw the broad gently rounded *face which the window s highlight outlined like that of a young* thoughtful and frightened Buddha

Her husband he thought In the agony hall I might let him talk to her a minute. No what s the good of that? He would only get *excited and get her excited No excitement Dr Strbu No tem*perament around here When you have your hospital—

It was l rge of solid marble with a vertiginous ramp descending to the beach of the Pacific The rooms were simple but gorgeous *No nurse was over twenty five and the solarium was glass-domed* so that one could see the stars Sup rintendent Strbu was living in the penthouse with his family He had a private switchboard to handle the transatlantic and transpacific calls He smiled at the *young Japanese and the man started to rise but Nick went quickly* away This is tough right now he thought but in a couple of hours all will be well He will be standing in her room wondering what to do with himself ravenously hungry and very bored

He found the woman at last her stretcher right beside his oper

Mitsu her age twenty-eight and tucked the chair ... mattress while her eyes peeked at him almost mischievously from under the folded towel

Hello Mitsu he said easily *Tired of waiting out here? I ll* take you in Are you sleepy?

I was she said They gave me something I don t remember coming down but I m not sleepy now Are you the doctor?

He pushed the door open with his knee manoeuvring the cart into the operating room I am the one who ll put you to sleep he said Right now we ll get you off this thing and put you on something more comfortable

He signalled to the circulating nurse Come on give us a hand. Here get on the other side You are so light, he said to Mitsu I could lift you with two fingers That s it. Is that better? he asked rearranging the thin duvetine cover worn to threads by daily boiling and tucking it tightly and reassuringly around Mitsu s shoulders and thighs as a small child is tucked in bed before the song and story and the bedtime prayer Is that better Mitsu?

She shifted her weight a little on the operating table not yet realizing that this was it her eyes now eager and rapid like a bird s now veiled and hooded when the waves of morphine she had just received rolled over her and ebbed away Her breathing at all times was shallow and oppressed as though she had been running an exhausting race As though thought Nick, every impulse of the heart had to be followed by another and that by another before the work of the first one could even be begun.

Yes she said it is better Thank you she said in her innocence that was nice of you—— he read the word doctor on her lips but the lips remained half-opened on the protruding teeth and a sigh half-choked came from her chest like a sob He noted once more with misgiving the appalling slightness of her body the sharpness of the jaw on which the skin was taut and the purplish colour of the lips He sat on his stool at the head of the operating table and cupped his hand around the side of her face seeking her pulse with his finger tips and observing the peculiar quality of its rebound. He pulled the chart towards him his hand still on the sleeping woman s cheek and started to read her case history

Japanese woman transferred from Charity Hospital to Musurus Hospital January 28 1954 on the recommendation of Dr Theodora Petrie. Age twenty-eight height, five feet and one inch weight, eighty-eight pounds Father dead of T B Mother in

Japan presumably living One brother living and well The patient is a widow her husband having died in a motor accident.

That man must have been her brother then thought Nick irrelevantly

Two children living and well, four years and five months of age. Childhood illnesses include measles in early childhood, whooping cough at seven and abscess behind the ear (mastoiditis?) at nine

He felt her head move under his hand and snuggle in his large palm as in the hollow of a pillow Then she sighed again and turned toward him her round black eyes lustreless under the oddly pinched Oriental lids

What s that for? she said

Which?

Those things those bottles that are hanging upside down on the stands

Oh that, he said, looking up The circulating nurse and Dr Bell *the intern, were preparing the transfusions Two pint bottles* were hooked up already and on the tray beside the instrument

T1 nedi

it are

You know he said. They told you They ll fix up that artery that s all.

But how she said withdrawing her face from his hand so that, looking at him upside down as he stood behind her she could still see him how are they going to do it?

Why he thought in surprise it s just junk what they say about the poker faced Japs She isn t poker faced at all Maybe it s us who can t read them but it s all there Why he went on thinking *while chatteringly reassuringly to her her face speaks just as plainly* as my sister s when I came in to scare her out of her nap and we looked into each other s eyes closer and closer until there was only one huge black cherry in the middle of the inverted face

Look he said to her you re supposed to sleep right now [illegible] I ll give you

[illegible] s

believing smile pulled the lips apart so that the childlike face became all at once worn hard and knowing You won t They never do She sighed again her choked interrupted sigh and her eyes still closed I ve been through this before I know They never do

She s right he thought I never will I don t have time There I go bluffing again and I can t even fool a patient half dead and the other half asleep and full of dope

I will he said to both of them and he looked at the chart to remember her name I will come Mitsu and we ll laugh together about how scared you were and you will tell me Nick you were right

Nick she said and then mouthed some words numbly and he bent over her to listen harder

The door from the scrub room swung open and Petra came in her hands straight before her her hair covered her face covered all covered now in the shapeless gown being tied by the nurse even the hands buried in the surgical gloves which snapped about her wrist her hands square well muscled the square-fingered hands active quiet eloquent abandoned the hands that once—when was it yesterday?—had pulled his ears

He had been in the library reading in the *Archives* a long involved article about the artificial kidney—too awkward too impossible to set up in emergencies His artificial lung was so much simpler such a simple idea if only someone would not think of it before he had it figured out and drawn and had made at least one test and found its faults and made corrections Then he d have to write the paper and send it out and that d be the beginning Then she had come in. Even though his back was to the door he knew at once that it was Petra It was as though he had divided himself since he had fallen in love with her and he the real self had his hands out all the time to catch a fold of her dress as she went by He had turned to her with a movement so quick so

him And stared
w him

She had come to him then pulled in by his hard demanding look and then laughed and put her hands out to him tugging at his ears patting them down fitting them to the side of his face and
from far away

of cartilage and a few stitches that's all

and that's over When do we do it

No he said I keep them that way I hear my voices better that way

And your patients? How do you want your patients to take you seriously like this little boy? she said She patted his cheek

ig me but she
was yesterday
Would she be
angry? Would she remember?

Hello Dr Petrie he said taking in avidly in one gulp of desire the straight brows the blue-eyed smile above the mask, the tall roundness and lankiness of her through the surgical gown and then rapidly looking away as though she didn't matter Hello Dr Petrie in sharp forced syllables your patient is getting curious now She's beginning to fret.

Hasn't she had her hypo? said Petra coming nearer coming so near that by moving a little he could have touched her He moved
he touched.
irs ago Dr Taikkes is late
eaning over and examining the
patient closely her hands joined and turned away from the table so that she wouldn't contaminate her gloves her face close to the other woman's face which suddenly looked even greener now even more shrunk and morbid Mitsu isn't a bit worried. I know my girl Are you doing the anaesthesia Nick?

Yes he said *I am. His eyes on the chart he pretended to*

read. Then, feeling her disapproval in the silence that fell, Sandstrom is helping he said. He was here a minute ago. He'll be back.

Oh, she said, the Chief is helping! How nice of Sandstrom. She moved away He waited a minute until the wrenching had eased a littl., then flipped back the pages of the case history which had slipped up on his knees and went on reading

Mastoiditis at nine. Several bouts of tonsillitis. When eleven years old, entered Mercy Hospital for T and A but was sent home without surgery the doctor having found some cardiac anomaly He told her mother that her heart was too small or too large, she does not remember which. She had some difficulty keeping up with gym and was finally excused from it. No fainting episodes or other cardiac difficulty In 1941 at fifteen years of age, was sent to relocation camp where she remained four years working in camp kitchen. Father contracted TB there and succumbed to it. Patient took care of father was exposed to TB but did not contract it. In 1943 and in 1944 contracted pneumonia and again in 1949 the lower left lung showing some areas of consolidation.

Okay Nick, let s get started, said Sandstrom, coming in and picking up the blood pressure cuff Quickly he slipped the patient s right arm from under the coverlet and wrapped the grey cuff tightly around it. Nick stood up and watched. Mitsu s arm was so thin that the cuff hardly dented the pale flesh, so closely was it stretched upon the bone. Mitsu turned her head wearily towards the two men but said nothing With a slow movement, sh wriggled free of the head band. Nick started to replace it but Sandstrom stopped him.

Don t bother he said. If they don t like their eyes covered, don t insist. It is only meant to encourage drowsiness. If they are not drowsy well—

Nick looked around the room trying to see if there was anything that would scare her The transfusion bottles at the foot of the table were now draped and hidden from view Those at the head were out of her circle of vision

Blood pressure 1.0 over 90 said Sandstrom, watching the column of mercury fall back into place. Here, mark it down.

Isn
Ni

waiting also wrapped and standing near the wall their gloved hands hidden under a sterile towel Dr Stull came into the room, buoyant, shining in his operating cotton slacks and short sleeved cotton shirt his red hands before him Betty emptied a folder of talcum into them and then presented him with the open gloves

Where are you going you? he said His voice was vibrant assertive and commanding just as his face the angular long jawed face of the Anglo-Saxon with the short, stubby red moustache was the face of a man who gave orders a man who was to be obeyed. Had Taikkes felt that? Was that why Stull had been chosen?

Nick nodded toward Sandstrom Dr Sandstrom is getting her started I m going to call the Chief to see if he s in the building

He ll get here all right, said Stull. I m in charge of this job if Taikkes isn t around. We have a schedule to stick to If he s late we can t wait for him. What s the matter Betty? Did I say something *funny? Did I tickle your sense of humour? Do you think* you re at a show? Get going start the IV Go ahead Sandstrom. I m ready

Nick hesitated a moment then not caring whether Stull should see him or not, he dashed out of the room and through the corridor to the main desk.

He seized the telephone dialled the Lobby Desk. Hi Dimwit, he said has Taikkes come in yet?

I ll check, she said then after a moment No he isn t signed in.

said Nick. Don t
Stull is starting a

It s his service said Nick, but it s a free case and Stull is starting it Taikkes should be here, he should be here right now

Well, said the clerk if Stull s in charge and Taikkes is late *it s his funeral isn t it?*

No said Nick furiously it isn t. It s hers maybe

2

A SILENCE fell upon the room with Sturbu s departure As if Stull thought all sound had been sucked out by the motion of the swing ing door As though it was he the anaesthetist no not even that the assistant to the anaesthetist who had been centre stage so that even while he was speaking to Hornsby Stull felt the interest of his resident dwindle and diverge and his attention focus beyond him beyond the tiled wall of the operating room waiting for the sounds of other steps for a voice other than his own

Stull stopped in mid-sentence Then as if moved by a pendulum every pair of eyes in the surgical ampitheatre swung back from the door to him and he felt the physical impact as sharply as a slap Anger which he had contained with such difficulty since the moment he had wakened and found beside him his wife pretend ing to sleep (the face too closed too tight the breath too shallow too short not the slow belly breathing of deep sleep but the breathing controlled and racing of a woman preparing her deceit lying to him before she had even opened her eyes lying unfor givably hiding her disapproval in her sleep her distrust—how could she!—her condemnation) anger rose churned and broke

one s self than to hold one s own vom t is

Absently he watched Sandstrom withdraw the endotracheal tube from the unconscious woman s throat then slide it in again The

girl retched. Her repulsively frail body arched itself briefly upward Her chest rose with the scooped parallel furrows between the ribs and the breasts livid and shrunken Sandstrom twirled the gauge of the cyclopropane tank and she relaxed again. Come in, Nick, he said. Raise her shoulders a bit

But Nick had stopped still and turned to Stull and Stull felt for a second time the shock of his indignation. Why he thought in surprise the misgivings awakened in him by Mitsu s emaciated body now shifted and dismissed why the boy hates me They all hate me Why?

He looked around him Betty her table at last in order and the instrument tray at the foot of the operating table adjusted on its pivot, was looking down at her folded hands Hornsby s and Bell s eyes avoided his The circulating nurse turned away from him in an unconscious gesture more eloquent than words There was silence in the room a void about him substantial and real as a wall. Averted faces down-drawn lids Pretended sleep Dislike He pressed his hands together moistened his lips under the mask. Why he asked himself Then aloud Ready? he said.

Sandstrom stood up the mask now in place the oxygen filling

Stull nodded to the intern Start soaping her he said and backing away watched the long swirls of foam massaged over and over upon the plae flesh of her flank. She ll be all right he said to Sandstrom stopping him near the door

Sandstrom s hands fumbled nervously with his thick lensed glasses Yeah, he said, she s okay so far I m glad you re doing it old boy he added with forced humour and not I. I wouldn t wish it on my mother in law

But somebody s got to do it Sandy he said I wouldn t wish it on anybody either but without surgery she hasn t a ghost of a chance Come take a look at her X rays You ll see what I mean

Yeah, said Sandstrom I ve seen them I ve got a spinal to get going before the D and C. His cold grey eyes distorted

through the lenses remained one moment on Stull s face—in curiosity in commiseration?—then pivoting on his heel he went out

The thick coating of soap dissolved under the rivulets of alcohol. Then dipping the gauze sponge in iodine the intern started painting the rib-cage

I should feel complimented thought Stull Hatred is a compliment in reverse of course but still a compliment The ultimate homage of the impotent toward the winner I ve never hated anyone in my life I ve never had to hate I ve never sat that low That fellow there that Nick with the protruding ears will never get anywhere except through his emotions the crude emotions of a peasant He ll never rise above them Unless——

Bending deep behind the sheet that screened off the patient s head from the surgical field Nick was checking the oxygen flow Then for a fraction of a second his capped head emerged from behind the tent and he glanced at the glassed in gallery above the surgical floor And that glance was so aimed so direct and bare that Stull turned also and looked up

Petra he said in surprise what are you doing up there? You were scrubbed weren t you? Weren t you going to assist to help me?

Slowly she shook her head without speaking looked at him looked away and then forced her eyes toward him again with the involuntary caress of her dark lashed blue eyes She had pulled down her mask now and it hung on her chest with the warm stain of lipstick in the middle like a pendant on a chain No the eyes said not for me—or else no not for you Which?

He smiled at her ironically slowly just long enough to make her understand that it was a matter of no importance to him whether having prepared herself to assist Taikkes she was unwilling to assist him He did not need her help It was simply a gesture of courtesy toward Taikkes whose favourite she was He had his residents his interns He did not believe in women physicians in women surgeons In certain hospitals in Europe women were not allowed in the operating room It made for greater unity of purpose for singleness of thought. Doing the job Doing it successfully That was everything And it was enough.

Scalpel he said to Betty and at last, rigid with power with the joy and certitude of success he came to the table

Rapidly he began to work. The knife deftly described the arching incision over the fifth rib and the resident s forceps grasping the edge of the skin held it apart The scalpel returned to the apex of the incision retraced its path entered deeper into the fascia. The intern caught the edge of the cut blood vessel with haemostats on each side of the wound then touched the gauze sponge to it absorbing the single growing red drop which followed the down stroke of the blade The sterile towels were draped covering the side of the chest so that now nothing of Mitsu remained in sight except a rectangle of whitish, bluish membrane covering the eight inch length of rib exposed. With neat, repeated strokes the scalpel began dividing the muscular wall which covered the heart.

Petra kept her eyes averted until the clicking of the forceps told her that the first incision was made It was an absurd squeamishness or course one that she would rather die than admit to Taikkes for instance but she did not like to see the first incision. Fifteen years of medical practice had not eased it from her mind. She probably would never get over it Not that it mattered. She was a diagnostician not a surgeon. The minor emergency surgery she occasionally had to perform for her patients the lancing of a Bartholin abscess a deep-set splinter to be removed a cut to be stitched, she did easily with the same skill that had made Dr Taikkes say when [illegible]

down his surgical residency She wanted her patients awake, not asleep not dormant not anonymous under the sheet which covered them during the operation. She liked people, she felt their needs she heard their secret voices sharply clearly under the hesitant or the disguised complaints in the consultation room. She wanted to diagnose to advise to encourage The rest was up to the men.

She watched Dave Stull working with his usual competence, dividing ligating reflecting the pitifully slender coating of muscle, noting that his interns and the chief resident, Hornsby himself, treated him now with the same deference with which they dealt

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Monastery of the Oblates of St Bede Dr Garth Taikkes was to be no more Instead there would be Garth Taikkes postulant novice and later Brother Aloysius of the Oblates And that for Taikkes had been the final blow

Poor old Taikkes thought Petra commiseratingly watching the younger man operate the man who in a few years would be taking over his place his office his patients and who so close to the goal

He is finished he is letting go

Regret for the man he had been and could still be—he wasn t sixty yet physically strong and surgically and mentally a giant and as a lover a damn good lover She owed him her sanity in that awful time when she had divorced Herb and remained alone Regret mixed with resentment in Petra as she looked at Dave Stull cool authoritative barking orders and being obeyed with dislike and with jealousy perhaps but also with unwilling ad miration

He was doing the job He was doing it well Taikkes had not erred in choosing Dave Garth having deserted for his heir and successor At thirty very young for a surgeon Dave Stull was a master and he was growing still He was bold he was ingenious and he was fearless Whether he was human or not had very little to do with surgical technique It had everything to do with himself as a man But that of course was something that only his wife would know and suffer from the show girl he had married but

t

them Nothing is ever done nothing is ever finished no gesture is ever forgotten no action ever dies The past is not a dead pond into which we may throw our discarded youth. The past is a great womb the fertile uterus which breeds our own monstrous tomorrows

Her glance shifting from the red-stained gap of the operative

sheet turned to the anaesthetist behind the screen I should not have spoken to him yesterday she thought He doesn t know any one here he is lonely He s probably heard about my affair with Taikkes He may think I m to be had. Let him try she thought contemptuously Let him just look at me again with that ravenous look of his I ll slap him down I ll put him in his place It s about time I did

In the theatre below things were progressing now Stull peri osteum elevator in hand was dissecting the length of rib for removal a step necessary for a good exposure of the heart She heard the soft burr of the Gigly saw the snap of the fractured bone and Dave Stull s voice again

I ll remove two ribs he was saying to Hornsby It isn t essen

-bed but it ll save us

work blind He bent

All right, he said take it off Hornsby lifted the second length of bone with his forceps and deposited it in the basin at his side There it is said Dave

Petra leaned her forehead against the glass partition of the gallery and watched the slow flutter of the tissues the twin grooves of the rib bed pulsating with each uneven intake of breath.

How s the blood pressure Nick? said Dave He waited listening for the answering squeeze of the blood pressure bulb his scalpel ready to incise the pleura and to reach at last the heart

Pulse ninety-eight said Nick. BP 110 over eighty Dropping

Start the

bl

stricted the transfusion tube and released it adjusting the speed of blood flow carefully watching it a minute to make sure the filter was working then he nodded to Stull Okay

Under the rush of outside air into the chest cavity the lung encased in its pleura collapsed with a soft hiss Nick started pressing the air balloon connected through the mask to the other lung which filled collapsed refilled as in natural breathing

Stull unhurried, watched the lung s hesitant excursion the bare palpitating lung soot stained smoke-stained its dark colour telling the long history of the city dweller the factory worker the slum dweller the buyer of cheap contaminated air of impure breath. I shall have to move thought Stull get out of the city commute He waited for a slower more controlled rhythm Not so fast doctor he told Nick. Don t get excited Ten twelve times a minute is plenty Up he raised his arm like an orchestra conductor down like this Up—down—up—down Get it?

Nick s eyes followed the gesture then his head dropped again The lung expanded and contracted again, more deliberately tentatively as though already tired.

That s it said Dave Stull. Keep it up but don t rush. Now he said to Hornsby put in the spreader

Nick s voice rose muffled under the sheet. I wish someone would get Dr Sandstrom

Go get Sandstrom, said Hornsby to the circulating nurse He s in C Alec s operating room or else in the office

I ll go said Petra Tying on her mask, she came down the steps

you expect?

Do you think she ll make it? she asked in a voice which he

strom the kid s panicking That s a good girl

You ve got to talk to them in their language He was learning to You ve got to call them girls no matter which side of forty they are sitting on no matter how broad the beam. She was close to forty one way or the other he didn t care which. She had never appealed to him and the knowledge that others found her attractive always surprised him. He couldn t see it. He couldn t stand women physicians Nurses yes midwives yes obstetricians or pediatricians he placed in the same category with women lawyers or women preachers The bunk. Show-offs Between the two he d

sheet turned to the anaesthetist behind the screen. I should not have spoken to him yesterday she thought. He doesn t know any one here, he is lonely He s probably heard about my affair with Taikkes He may think I m to be had. Let him try she thought contemptuously Let him just look at me again with that ravenous look of his I ll slap him down. I ll put him in his place It s about time I did.

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I ll remove two ribs he was saying to Hornsby It isn t essential. I could get at the aorta through one rib-bed, but it ll save us a lot of fumbling in the dark. I don t like to work blind. He bent over the field and divided the next rib

All right, he said take it off Hornsby lifted the second length of bone with his forceps and deposited it in the basin at his side There it is said Dave.

Petra leaned her forehead against the glass partition of the gallery and watched the slow flutter of the tissues the twin grooves of the rib bed pulsating with each uneven intake of breath.

How s the blood pressure Nick? said Dave He waited listening for the answering squeeze of the blood pressure bulb his scalpel ready to incise the pleura and to reach, at last, the heart.

Pulse ninety-eight, said Nick. BP 110 over eighty Dropping

Dr Stull s hand tightened around the scalpel handle Start the blood, he said. We re about to go in.

Without rising Nick reached the clamp which constricted the transfusion tube and released it adjusting the speed of blood flow carefully watching it a minute to make sure the filter was working then he nodded to Stull. Okay

Under the rush of outside air into the chest cavity the lung encased in its pleura, collapsed with a soft hiss Nick started pressing the air balloon connected through the mask to the other lung which filled, collapsed refilled as in natural breathing

He ought to work in a garage That s the place for him, said Stull in a low voice Then louder All right now keep it going That s better That s it Neatly his probe pressed upon the aorta

[illegible]

think there s a bigger one described in medical history! I ll have to write a paper on it. Here he said, backing out put your hand in it and judge for yourself

I can see said Hornsby leaning forward. It s almost as big as the heart Do you think you can fix it?

Dr Stull tried to control the exultation he felt from showing in his voice. You fool he wanted to shout go back to your bunions With your timidities and your doubts you are not worthy of look into into the Arch of Alliance Three times I ve been challenged since I entered this room half an hour ago and before I came here Dido presumed to tell me to give up Watch and see idiots watch how I fix it Tomorrow you will not be asking me

Aloud in a cold voice he said I can try Andy the haemostats

3

Dave Stull was pacing back and forth from the bedroom to the bathroom to the bedroom again from one end of it to the other and out to the kitchen—there very briefly—and into the bedroom again not noisily not banging things but with no effort at quiet not caring really whether he woke her up or not And all that time curled up in bed knees against her chin she kept up the pretence of sleep her face turned away to the wall breathing slowly He had his coat on at last and found his keys She heard him near the door of the hall checking the contents of his brief case as he

relief she let go of her tenseness and her body half turned in bed. Just then he came back into the bedroom

So you are awake he said And by his voice she knew that all that had happened last night the kisses and the happy caresses the hot, wild words and the loss of each in the other were as though they had not been As though for him as well as for her Dido leep had come in when he had turned off the lights after their quarrel last night As though they had slept side by side each on his side of the combination radio table—but his bed was not disturbed—and were rising now strangers

She stretched her toes pointed he back arching Hello she said You re dressed. What time is it?

It s almost seven he said and I m operating at eight

She closed her eyes Not that, she thought let s not talk about that again You ve eaten? she asked

There s no coffee left, he said. I ll stop at the drugstore I drank all there was of the milk. I m not asking the impossible Dido when I demand breakf st.

She said nothing

Did you hear me? he insisted, standing beside her bed, looking down at her so tall, looking down from so far away his hat on his head, brief case under his arm, looking like a judge or a teacher with only the cane or the gavel missing she thought, looking up at him through half-closed eyes

Yes she said I heard you. Go on, get out, bad man. Get out before I think I ve had a nightmare.

Dave, she said when he was near the door again, come back here. She sat up the covers falling about her waist. Aren t you going to kiss me? she said He leaned over her kissed her angrily aimlessly and the side of his brief case hit her breast and it was as though he had done it on purpose as though he had managed at last to hurt her where he wanted to hurt her to hurt her as a woman to punish her for his needing her as much as he did. And the words which were coming to her mouth, the good show words which bring luck to the performer the hope you ll break a leg the rub the rabbit s foot, all the little ritual of one showman to another were choked down and lost. She did not cry out she kept her hands as they were tight at her side but after he had left, she remembered.

Soundlessly she laughed in bed, rubbing her bruise since he was gone now and she could hurt. She laughed because she couldn t help it, she was meant to be beaten. One way or the other but always legally she was to earn her living by being beaten. There was a play called *He Who Gets Slapped* Well, it was like that for her too it seemed. *She Who Gets Hit* It was written in the stars she supposed by whoever does the casting and Dido Stull, no more than Dido Lavalliere, no more than Dorothy Miller could do anything about it. She was type-cast and that was that.

She got out of bed, found a cigarette, lit it and went to the kitchen. He had been right. There was no coffee No fruit juice either She would have to order both. She would make a list long enough for ten years and pack it all into the kitchenette so that it wouldn t happen again, so he wouldn t be angry again. She shrugged her shoulders There would always be something

But I won t be slapped, she thought and then repeated it stepping

on th bath.oom scales, watching with surprise the pointer by-pass the accustomed place. I m gaining weight, sh- thought. I wouldn t be worth anything at the Blitz any more. I wouldn t have to stuf myself as I used to but I couldn t dance any more. Not now And I won t be slapped. Spanked, yes, I m used to it. Becaus. tha was a job and I go paid for it. And I knew what I was getting into.

But you were fifteen, she said to herself, getting under the shower and letting the cool water run down hard all over her and wash out the pain and the sham and, above all, the caresses of the night that she didn t want anv more. I was fifteen and we were all broke as hell and I didn t look a day over ten years old and nobody remembers anyway Forty dollars a week was more than Dad ever mad. in h.s life. And Dad was on relief.

It had been a stroke of luck really their going down to Venice, Florida, way back in 1939 She was six years old then. Sh. still remembered the long trip that was such a lark in her fa.her s ancient Chevvy the four children packed among the d.br-s of the hous.hold in the rear the bedsprings of the on good bed t-d on top of the car and mother in front with th. youngest, Lit! Joe who was onl) three months old. It had been a long trip from Opportunity Kansas. Twice they stopped in tourists cabins and once th-v had slep in a real hous., that of Dad s uncle where they had all ba.hed and eaten a real fill-up and stayed two days before starting again. Uncle Frank had given Dad some money twen'v dollars, to help get started and that had paid for the rest of the trip By the time they got down to Venice where a friend of Dad s was in business, the wea.her had grown quite cold and they had snow down there for the first time in years. Dad had found a job, a job where there was a place fo- everybody to sleep and money enough for Mother to do with now that everything had to be bought. Ther- was no garden, or rather the man whose house i was did not pe-mit anyon to ra.se anything in the garden.

Th. man didn t live there any more and wouldn t for a long while. He was in the penitentiary it seemed, for income tax evasion, but tha. was only th apparent reason. There were others tha. everybody seemed to know but they the children, were not supposed to know about i nor even to speak of i.. Th-y lived in

the back of the house the front being kept closed and only in spected at intervals by Mother while Dad took care of the grounds The garden was huge even for little Kansans with the fenceless sweep of prairies in the back of their eyes but it wasn t the kind of garden that one could play in. It was gravelled paths and regular spaced bushes and, although it was Florida not an orange tree But they had plenty of food and Mother got a few chickens the second year which she kept out of sight behind the house Dad said nothing about it even though he had made such a scene when she had tried putting in the beans and had stamped it all down so that nothing ever came through Little Dido Dorothy that was liked being there living like a princess as her mother said though she never had any clothes bought for her All the things she wore had come down from Helen her older sister and smelled of the stale perfume Helen got from her boy friend at the drugstore Dorothy hated the stinking stuff But school was swell and she learned to swim and best of all she got in all the school plays

Dido turned off the faucets got out of the shower and started rubbing herself with the turkish towel There she thought I m brand new now and nothing has happened. This is a brand new day and I m somebody else I m not Dorothy any more not Dido-who-gets-hit nor anybody s wife either I ll go out and start fresh and see who I want to be and how it feels

She went to the bedroom and selected defiantly the blue lace slip which Dave called showy and vulgar I ve really gained weight this last month she thought I wish I could tell him and that he wouldn t get mad. It s not my fault I m going to have a baby I think it s nice His baby in me a redhead like him real smart like him If only I d get the nerve to tell him Why doesn t he know? Why can t he tell? He s a doctor he ought to figure it out But it s always operations operations operations I wish—gosh how I wish he d let that girl alone I m scared to death and I don t even want to think about it But he s doing it, he s doing it now and I bet he s twice as scared as I am and I am scared enough to throw up!

No she thought I won t think about it. It s his job and he s got to start some place And if he wasn t good enough Tarkkes wouldn t let him do it Besides Tarkkes will be there and watch

him I only wish he wouldn t tell me about it I wish I had never spoken to her never heard her name. Mitsu

I ll get a new dress she thought. A new dress to start a new day I ll go to Peck & Peck. I ve never been there before I ll buy myself a maternity dress I can t wait to buy a maternity dress She laughed. A maternity dress for me!

She put on the grey angora sweater and the swirl skirt that buttoned more tightly now She spent several minutes putting on lipstick trying to find a new mouth to fit the new Dido and found one which although it wasn t as good as her own would do Prissy she thought I ll be prissy today and cantankerous A girl out of Vassar shopping at Peck & Peck, a girl who has bought her own clothes from the age of six and who doesn t get scared of bitchy saleswomen a girl who s going to have a baby and with whom they ll have to be careful. But I ll call Hermana she thought Hermana had better go with me

The maid rapped at the door and then turned the key and came in.

Hello Abby she told the old black woman I m just going out I m sorry I have no coffee for you this morning I haven t had breakfast yet and the doctor didn t either So there won t be any dishes for you.

Easily she fell back into the speech and accents of the south without thinking because she liked Abby and felt at home with h[illegible] she said You

[illegible] y but I ll clean up anyhow They se only one bed to make up she said going into the bedroom. Tha s the way I likes it. No fuss for my ole bones I always likes to clean it nice once a week anyways and so I ll clean up the apartment next door since they s so little to do for in here It ll give me more time to do it real good. You going out now Miss Dido?

I ll buy me a dress said Dido and charm my husband all over again. Take it easy Nobody ll know the difference.

I won t call Hermana she thought, throwing on her coat and receiving happily Abby s approval of her I ll just drop in on her

It s so early she may not have gone to bed yet and we ll have breakfast together I don t care if Dave doesn t want me to see her She s my pal and I like her

The elevator boy turned to her with a grin after starting the down motion of the cage Lost that hat again? he said alluding to an argument she had had with Dave a few days before about going out bare-headed

She tilted her nose up glancing past him and smiling at the empty space Smarty! she said He grunted a small conspira torial grunt that meant that she was a dish all right that she suited him with or without hat He was nineteen perhaps eighteen or nineteen younger than she by a couple of years half as old almost as Dave but his knowledge of life was a hell of a lot longer longer even than hers and together without saying anything they knew it

But when she was with Dave he kept his face in order steady and grave under the low cap of slicked black hair and looked at her with casual deference as though she had been sixty and needed

like you to meet Miss—Miss—oh yes Miss Lavalliere I am terrible at names—— when a couple of nights before it had been Dido Dido Dido and she had had to hear everything of his life including his blood pressure and the type of corset his wife wore

It had been fun in a way she thought stepping out into the sharp wet February wind and receiving bravely its brusque hair pulling caress Especially now it was fun because she saw them from the other side of the curtain right side up and pretending But not to her and not for long That s what three years of danc ing and singing did for a woman And I wouldn t exchange it she thought for all the colleges in the world

But Dave wanted to mop it off He wanted all that part of her life pushed out of her memory as though she had total amnesia He didn t want her friends any more not even Hermana. That was easy for him to say she thought resentfully He had never had any friends But how is it possible to go through thirty whole years

of life not sick not invalid but right where people are and eat with them go to school with them even take care of them and listen to their complaints and never get inside their lives? Not a friend not one And even I she thought I don t like him very much I m not sure at all that I like him now Do I like you Dave she asked of the dark-coated figure standing above her bed with the black homburg and the sharp-cornered brief case under his arm do I like you being with you? Would I like you as well if you hadn t a nickel in the world and I had to ride the streetcar to see you and spend my own dime to drink coffee in the morning sitting beside you in the drugstore and walking through the park in the evening because there wasn t money for the movies? As I liked Jimmy and after Jimmy that big lug of a Harold who was too dumb even to be an usher at the Palace but with whom I had so much fun in Hartford? But Harold was dead now a brave and honourable death in Korea and what was the use worrying about liking Dave since they were married now and it didn t matter any more?

She hurried her pace thinking that Hermana now would be through putting her hair up in curlers after the late night show and be going to sleep if she didn t hurry Her strong dancer s legs carried her swiftly through the streets faster than the morning shoppers walking downtown to kill their rolls of fat It was as though she had a job again and had to be there in time to rehearse after dancing five shows at the Blitz to prepare for the new programme

Because he never asked her anything about herself before Because he did not make it easy for her to laugh at the silly Dido of six years back, getting her first break in vaudeville as the brat who gets spanked at the end of the show her skirt lifted way up over the skin tight nylon panties in full view of the audience while she squealed like a pig and had to wiggle and kick her legs under the loud popping spanks Twice a day she got spanked and everybody roared when she squealed and yelled she gave it all she had because they liked it and because it stung That also was funny now but if she told it to Dave he would be angry and hurt and so she was too ashamed to tell him. How could you be friends with a

guy with whom you couldn t laugh and be ashamed at the same time?

But what about you Dave? Didn t you ever do anything wrong? Anything silly or to be ashamed of?

She turned the corner into the shabby street where Hermana lived where they had lived together That was how they had come to meet Dave Stull two years ago when he was a resident and Hermana was so ill that night that the hospital had sent him over right away Hermana had stayed in the hospital three weeks And Dido was very lonely and Dave had never known a song and-dance girl before That s how it had begun

She stood before the house which was not home any more the *three storey peeling skinned apartment house where mostly show* people lived It was only a fifteen minute subway ride from the Blitz night club Hermana was line captain there and right next door was the Television Studio where Dido had her daily routine after she had graduated from the Blitz Three years at the Blitz was all any girl could take and remain a girl although Hermana had been there seven But Hermana was different Hermana was hard from the inside out instead of from the outside in like most of the others

Dido looked at the house shabby pretentious with its false palms

names false lives Oh, Dave are you ashamed of that? she cried soundlessly in herself her hand on the door knob because the bell button never worked and the lock was set to open Is that what you are ashamed of—me me—of having married me? Is that why you can t say anything of what matters of what hurts? Is that why I can t talk to you and add more to your shame? Did I say yes too quickly? Should I have said no since I loved you Dave since I loved you hard enough to die?

No she said, pushing back the new and more cruel nightmare *along with the others with the twice-a day spanking with the* sleepless nights and days with being stranded in Windsor Ontario stranded and robbed and hungry with Jimmy gone back with the

How long will he be here this time?

Long enough to get his teeth fixed said Hermana Some crazy guy up North started pulling a tooth and broke it and nearly cracked his jaw So he got time out flew down here and now he don t want to do anything about it He hasn t seen the dentist yet.

Dido slipped out of her coat and looked around her The entrance opened directly into the sitting room a large room on the street with two windows and a nook which was meant for a dinette and where they had put the television set the pianist at the Blitz had given Hermana the year they were to have been married. Nome had made a big scene when he found out how she had got it and threatened to wreck it and throw it into the street, piece by piece They had all been a little drunk that day and the girls had sort of looked forward to it and egged him on without even looking at each other Right then and there they were hoping for a new and bigger screen and a better brand but Nome got wise to it because Dido had giggled and now you couldn t get a rise out of him any more He was real tame that guy a family kind of a guy in a way The only thing he was waiting for was for Hermana to say yes A good guy a sound guy with an ugly face but big enough for her a good sound guy with his heart in his right hand. It was she who couldn t make up her mind

Beyond the nook in the back part of the apartment was the bedroom and right beside the bedroom the extra closet they had had built in when Dido had moved in with Hermana Even so the two girls had always fought for space because of the costumes the sarongs the Spanish dress and shawl the white buckskin Indian dress with the big feathers and all the junk a girl has to have for special shows or out-of town dates

Dido threw her coat on the chair and came back to the sitting room. She sprawled on the chaise longue You re not working she said You look so rested it doesn t seem natural

Yeah said Hermana. Since Nome s back I stay awake during the day and I sleep nights Honest I don t have to take anything I just go to bed and sleep like a baby I d never thought I could do it again but I do It s been a week now and I still do

What about you said Hermana you look pretty happy your

guy with whom you couldn t laugh and be ashamed at the same time?

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casual letter from Harold s buddy— You better write to me now Cookie Harold s been gone for nearly two months No she thought I mustn t think of that I am his wife now I am going to have his baby I am pretty and he loves me

She hurled herself up the flights of stairs taking them two by two hurrying so that the nightmare would not catch up with her She pounded on the door Hermana! she cried Let me in It s Dido It s me!

4

HERMANA HAD her good dressing gown on the gown her pals at the Blitz had bought her when she was in the hospital. It was a man s gown because she was so tall. Ivory-coloured and rough in texture it fell straight from the neck to the ankles and was tied with a sash and with her skin absolutely without colour and her hair drawn back straight and the quiet way she had of speaking without expression, almost without moving her lips she looked good enough to be a statue. You almost wished she was a statue so she could remain as she was without changing without ever getting old and calm without worries and never have to get mad or have to holler at people at the band leader who was rushing her act at the girls in the line who were stealing her show at the men who kidded her about being bigger than they were. She didn t often get mad, you had to say that for Hermana but when she did she gave it all she had.

She stood in the doorway as she would for the milkman or the boy with a special delivery and her voice was low

What s up? she said, What got you out so early

Don t you want me in? said Dido I m hungry I haven t had breakfast, I walked—— Then, as Hermana shrugged and stepped back in the room their old room together Dido guessed. You aren t working you ve got somebody here. You ve got Nome.

Come on in, said Hermana, He s in there sound asleep Oh come on don t put on an act. Yeah, it s Nome. He flew in from Alaska last week and made straight for home.

Well said Dido if it s only Nome and if you re sure you don t mind——

He won t mind, said Hermana. He d love to see you. It s been a year mo e than a year since he s been down, he s dying to see his friends.

How long will he be here this time

Long enough to get his teeth fixed said Hermana Some crazy guy up North started pulling a tooth and broke it and nealy cracked his jaw So he got time out flew down here and now he don t want to do anything about it He hasn t seen the dentist yet

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What about you said Hermana you look pretty happy your

self What s new about you? Don t tell me you re pregnant or something

I m all right said Dido suddenly reticent I m happy because it was nice out there in the wind and I m glad to be in now I m all right

You ve come over to tell her remember? she said to herself You want to tell somebody and you ve come to tell her She asked you she almost guessed What s the matter what are you shy about she s your pal go on tell her

But how can you tell your pal about your baby when she s still fighting off her own man her own wedding How can she be happy about you when she s all alone Nome or no Nome back there in

die instead of swelling sweetly in his tiny baby sleep

I m all right but I am hungry You got bread enough for me? You want me to go out and get something some sweet rolls or something?

I ve got plenty I ll get it going said Hermana Wait a while he ll be up I hear him rumbling about in there I ll start the coffee He s the slowest guy to get going in the morning Ever seen a bear waking up after a six month sleep?

I guess that s the way they do it up north said Dido Dave wakes up bang he s all there beats the alarm clock every time Like he spent the whole night getting ready to wake up

How is Dave?

He s all right I tell you Always all right It gives me a pain sometimes the way he s always all right but that s the way he is I guess He can t help it any more than Nome can help the way he is

Yeah but Nome can take a load on his great big back said *Hermana Dave s the kind that goes to pieces all of a sudden He* can pretend longer than most but its pretence that s all it is

Sure said Dido then she frowned how do you mean pre tence? she said He doesn t pretend anything What does he have to pretend about?

He s just too darn perfect that s all I mean said Hermana A regular guy doesn t have to be that perfect all the time If he does he s worried about something that s what I mean And when he has to give up being perfect he ll go to pieces But that s your problem not mine Come to the kitchen I ll get started

I ll do it said Dido Let me the way I used to Boy you took the strainer out of the sink again Stubborn Sure he s the kind that goes to pieces she said brightly He did go to pieces once you know He married me

You lucky little bitch said Hermana She went to the bed room cracked open the door and called out Get ready you big Grizzly we got company and the company is hungry!

Hold your horses Who s company? said Nome still invisible Do I crawl out through the window or do I come out through the door?

It s me, cried Dido Come on out I want to talk to you you lug you goof you big loon I want to reform you make an honest man out of you

Cut it out said Hermana. I don t need your help He ll get the licence today if I say the word Yeah and fly me straight to Nome Alaska And what the hell would I do there?

Dido piled up the dishes on a tray pulled off three paper napkins from their box and brought the tray to the sitting room

I think it might be sort of fun she said softly I wish you d give it a try——

Nome came in the room nearly filling the whole door frame with his great figure a big grin on his silly crooked face the heavy seamed face of the labourer of the North Go on keep up the jabbering girls he said don t mind me Nothing I like better than waking up to hear a couple of girls yakkety yakking at each other That s the kind of racket I go for

About time you got up said Hermana I never seen such a man for sleep

You seen too damn many said Nome Well how are you kid you don t look changed a bit. Marriage s put a little meat on your bones though.

He kept her hand in his patting it with his own great paw and

Dido felt as she always had between these two that she was a little kid maybe ten years old that it was going to be fun that she was going to be allowed to play again

Yeah she said I ve put on weight I m eating like a pig Gee it s good to see you Nome gee you look just great! Are you going to be around for a while huh? Why didn t you let me know?

He grinned

Ask her he said I was all for it. I said where s the side-kick, Mamie first thing when I got in? I said what you done with the kid? I thought you had a falling out see? I thought you girls had a spat and you walked out on her?

Then she told you

Yeah she told me She got married she said She went and got married to a doctor in a hospital to a knife-artist Fancy guy fancy wedding All the trimmings Well congr ts Dido Couldn t happen to a nicer kid When do we celebrate?

Oh come on and sit down and eat said Hermana Dido I forgot the lemon for his tomato juice It s in the icebox Get it will you?

Dido washed the lemon sliced and brought it to the table

Isn t it horrible? she said I didn t have a thing for Dave this morning I clean forgot to shop last night We ve got a small kitchen too hardly bigger than this and not half so convenient and I had no coffee no milk no nothing

Was he mad? asked Nome

Kind of said Dido He had a big job in surgery this morning He got kind of fussed about it about breakfast I mean He doesn t get fussed about surgery

Skip the surgery said Hermana Nome s just like the rest of them Mention the hospital and just look at him

It s not that said Nome a hand to his cheek It s that damn tooth kicking a devil of a rumpus Honest I am scared to eat Hot cold everything It s just like a kick in the jaw

Dido put down her cup

Nome she said you dope why don t you go see a den tist?

That s a good question said Hermana Thirty-six times a day

he says his tooth is killing him and thirty six times I say just what you said. I say go see a dentist but it s like he was deaf and blind in both ears

I might be well by now said Nome I might have to go back See what I mean?

[illegible]

Let go of her hand said Hermana

Nome pursed his lips stubbornly but after a while his hand opened

Dido went to the phone and dialled her husband s office It s me she said Mrs Stull How are you? Look, I got a friend here who s dying with a broken tooth You know a dentist in the build ing for right away Yeah sure it s an emergency he is kind of rolling on the floor right now He s got the biggest pain in his tooth it s like somebody kicked him in the jaw No he didn t get kicked it s just his tooth Can you find somebody and fix it for today? Special favour?

She s trying to she said holding the phone away from her She ll try somebody on the floor on the other phone She waited looking at Nome and at Hermana he trying to drink his head cocked to one side and his paper napkin crumpled in his fist Hermana eating stubbornly without looking up jealous now that somebody else was trying to help her man It won t do her any harm thought Dido It ll be good for her It ll show her that a man has to be fussed over that it is fun to fuss over a man They like it no matter what they say about it and Nome is the swellest guy to make a fuss over

I wish Dave needed me she thought while she waited, standing [illegible]

tect. I wish he d go out some time with his collar turned under or his hat crooked on his red head so I could run after him and fix it I wish he d act crazy about things I wish he d forget things the

way husbands are supposed to I wish he had a hell of a toothache when he comes home tonight——

Yes she said in the phone. You found one! Gee that s swell Yeah, gee that s great Three o clock, that s the soonest? You ll have to wait till three o clock you dope she told Nome That s all right with you?

Nome made an assenting nod

Fine said Dido Yeah his name His name s Nome Nome that s his first name N—O—M—E Yeah like in Alaska that s right. That s where he s from What s your last name Nome?

Wait she said his name isn t Nome His first name is Adolph That s right like what s-his name Surprise to me too Adolph Bentiger That s right Dr Mills? Fourteenth floor three o clock Got it Thanks thanks a lot Miss Banks That s nice of you

She came back to the table Don t let me hear another peep out of you now she said to Nome

Your husband will hear about that said Hermana

Dave? Why should he? What s the difference? said Dido Why can t I get Miss Banks to make an appointment with a dentist for crying out loud? What s the matter with that?

Hermana looked at her with a mean little smile a smile that was meant to hurt a smile which was a small sized vengeance

What s the matter with her husband? asked Nome innocently He don t like his secretary pestered?

Don t be crazy said Dido My husband doesn t mind at all I never pester I just go in and wait there for him sometimes and Miss Banks she s lovely to me She s not Dave s secretary she s Dr Taikkes He s the Chief and he s had her in the office for over a hundred years There s nothing the matter with her I think she likes me

All I have to say said Nome is that marriage has done things for you youngster Kind of made you human I d like to meet the guy who did that for you Think he d like to meet me in a drink or something? Or is he really too fancy for me?

He s awful busy Nome said Dido You haven t any idea These guys keep on working like they were made of steel or something Three four operations in one day Sometimes they work

You re nuts said Nome It s not one woman or another Maybe that was the way with your television guy but that s not the way with me Go get your head under a faucet and cool off You re worse than a toothache Come on Dido let s get out of here

No said Dido I ll run along then she ll be all right. It s my fault I shouldn t have come in——

She stopped because Hermana was getting up and the face with out colour was getting flushed now and the dark eyes desperate.

Do you think he s been true to me all this time? she said Do you think I count in his life more than the man hunters they have up there? Do you think he comes here for any other reason except that it saves him the bother of fishing somebody else out of the pond and start the business all over again? Do you think he s in love with me?

Nome got up Right now I say you re poison he said What s the matter with you anyway? If that s the way you feel about me why did you take me in in the first place? What did I do? Do I insult a girl when I ask her to marry me?

Hermana picked up a few dishes Her mouth was beginning to work. She started toward the kitchen then convulsively she put down the dishes and running to the bedroom closed the door behind her with a slam.

Well said Nome He stood hesitatingly looking at Dido look ing away What s my line now? Where did I get off the track? What s a guy to do?

You better let her cool off I guess said Dido I think maybe you were right. I think maybe she s scared of you Maybe not of you I mean maybe of changing everything I think that maybe she s thinking about it hard and fighting against it because she s scared. Don t you think so?

I don t know Dido said Nome I don t know what she d be scared of She couldn t be scared of me now could she?

He walked to the bedroom door listened his face creased in a frown He came back, shaking his head. I never knew girls took marriage that hard, he said And I m real sorry honest I am that you had to get in on this

Don t worry about me said Dido It s all right we re pals

Sure he said she don t mean anything by it. She just got excited But I m sorry just the same. And I thought we d go out and celebrate about you I mean about your getting fixed up so nice and all

That s all right Nome she said We ll celebrate yet I won t let you leave town again without celebrating We ll go out on a real *toot all three of us* Well *maybe not a real toot* she amended I guess that wouldn t be right for me any more but we ll celebrate You call me when Hermana s okay

I ll call you he said *I m going to have a short one right now* I think I need it You ll stick around?

Run along said Dido I ll stick around She ll be all right Maybe you better not bring up the subject again not for a while I mean Not until she does

You bet said Nome with feeling He gr bbed his coat and without looking back, went out.

Quietly Dido had begun to clear the table when she heard a whistle from the street She went to the window Nome was on the sidewalk below mouthing something she could not understand She struggled a moment with the warped window then got it open Hey kid said Nome How can I call you when I don t know your name or your number?

Dido gave them to him, then shivering she started to close the window He made a vague gesture She come out yet? Dido shook her head and slammed the window shut Shaking his head *tiredly Nome turned and went down the street.*

Dido stood a moment chafing her arms to warmth finished clearing the table washed and dried the dishes and put them away She straightened up the room smoked a cigarette and then sat down and waited The bedroom was silent as though it was empty After a while Dido crossed the room on tiptoe and opened the door Hermana was lying on the bed barefoot motionless one hand holding the collar of her dressing gown over her f ce Dido closed the window making as little noise as she could, then she went to get her coat When she returned, Hermana was awake

She sat up and put her feet on the floor I fell asleep she said

Honest to pete I was asleep Can you beat that? Sorry I made all that noise kid I didn t mean to

You want me to go home?

I m not mad at you Dido said Hermana I don t know what got into me It s Nome that gets me I guess He thinks life s so darn simple

Dido wrapped her coat around her and sat down She looked at Hermana sadly I m not going to say another word she said I guess I say all the wrong things anyway You know best what s good for you

Oh hell said Hermana how do you ever know? You just guess that s all and sometimes it works out It s working out for you It is isn t it? It s working out all right?

Yes said Dido in a small voice it is

Hermana was different now after her blowup and after her sleep She was the good old Hermana the one who fixed things right who told her what to do who told her who to see what to say how to do her hair what clothes to wear She never seemed to see anything but sometimes like now she d look at you and you felt she cared that she was in your shoes for a while that she knew what it was to be you Dido what it was to be little and uncertain and even lonely

I want a baby Hermana, said Dido softly I want a baby so badly I could die She couldn t tell anybody before she told Dave since she didn t know what Dave would say but she could tell her that much That much wouldn t hurt anything

Well go ahead and have one peanut said Hermana He can t stop you if you really want one

This was my bed, thought Dido It s so funny to think it s not my bed any more that it is hers and Nome s

Do you really want one?

Yes said Dido She shivered and looked up Aren t you cold? she asked Isn t there any heat in this bedroom?

And he doesn t want you to have it?

I haven t said anything to him about it

What a child they would have she thought Hermana and Nome both of them so strong both of them immense But what about my

child, if I can have it if I ll let myself have it if Dave lets me? But will he think it right will he think it right that I should have his child? Can he force me to give it up if I want to have it?

How long will it be until he finds out? How long can I keep it from him? How far along does the baby have to be before it s dangerous to get rid of it, before Dave won t be able to tell me that he s changed his mind about me that I m not good enough for him, not good enough to be the mother of his baby not proper enough to carry his baby in me?

Men are different said Hermana Nome wouldn t mind it a bit

Oh, Dave damn you couldn t you have let me alone? I d be married to some guy like Nome and the baby would be his and he d be sweet about it and proud of me too of the first good thing I ve done in my life instead of hiding it as though I wasn t even married instead of being scared and ashamed

We all have to pay the price said Hermana lighting a cigarette If I marry Nome I ll drop a couple of floors You kicked yourself upstairs all right Well you ve got to pay that price too I guess you can t order him around

I m his wife said Dido He married me I didn t force him to

That s right said Hermana you didn t force him

Why did he marry me? said Dido eagerly Why did he pick on me? He didn t have to He must have known plenty of others nice girls rich girls and all. He didn t have to pick on somebody like me

Hermana pulled a deep drag from her cigarette What do you want me to tell you? she said He married you because you re cute because you re his type that s all

You know I m not his type

Well you tell me why said Hermana. I ll be darned if I know

Everybody wonders said Dido I know when we go out when we go to dinner at the Chief s house when I go to the wives teas—I don t any more I tried a couple of times—they look at me like I was an escapee from the women s pen The way they talk to me, you d die like I was a foreigner like I didn t understand Eng

lish. And he knows it I think He tries to cover up and I pretend I don t notice but I m not that dumb Hermana I can read straight [illegible] what

I told you what they think. They think what did he marry *her* for? And I thought I knew but I m not sure any more It doesn t matter that much to sleep with someone It s the waking up that counts

Like this morning like his face this morning

You re telling me said Hermana I just woke up worse luck.

That s what I was trying to tell you said Dido humbly I m plain scared sometimes I m scared to find out why

Dave s funny said Hermana The way I see him is this He likes himself so well he s never got around to women very much not even women alone just people Maybe he s scared of women but he isn t scared of you see? He wanted to get married because he s a man all right. So he picked on somebody he never could have an inferiority complex with But he hadn t counted on being made fun of by the others the ones that count in his life It gripes him to have them make fun of you because it s him they make fun of *really* The joke s on him.

She jabbed her cigarette in the ash tray got up found her slippers and went to the bathroom to shower and dress Dido heard the shower start and then she couldn t hear it any more because the sounds she was making were filling her own ears the convulsive words that she had choked down too long the long scream and the crying And then she wasn t crying any more nor screaming even but retching big spasms from deep inside her stomach, spasms that tore at her throat and that she couldn t stop no matter how hard she tried Then she gave up trying She was just hanging to the back of her chair with both her hands and biting her hands with her teeth, keeping it down keeping from flying out of her terror with each stroke of the lash that struck across her heart

What s the matter kid? said Hermana a moment later Gee I never knew you to have hysterics What the hell did I say? Gee forget it, forget what I said Lie down, Dido I ll get you some

water Don t scare me like this Dido I didn t mean it, kid I m a stinker Come on Dido drink some will you? That s the girl. Gee I m sorry You shouldn t listen to me Dido I told you that before Feeling better now? Want me to get you some coffee

Dido sat up and blew her nose She rubbed her eyes and rubbed her swollen face and pulled her fingers through her hair I m all right, she said I don t know I guess I m all right. I am upset maybe about Dave I don t know why I started kicking around like that except that——

That what?

I don t know she said feeling wretched Feeling wretched because she did know she knew all right. Because it was Dave she wanted to kick and hurt Hurt him and hurt him till he yelled. Till he became human at last Until he had tears in his eyes and she knew that he was hers

But does a man ever belong to a woman the way a woman belongs to him? Aren t they both supposed to be one with the other so there s no belonging but only one out of two? Each rich with *the life of the other feeling with the skin of the other until the* other s heart and flesh are at last dearer to you and closer than your own? And it was that way with her but it wasn t with him. First he was a man a surgeon with his own business his people to see and take care of and next he was the man to whom she Dido *belonged; And that was all He planted alone in the centre of the* world to whom everyone came whom everyone served as well as they could with whatever means they had with their heart s love if they were Dido with their real heart of flesh if they were Mitsu

Mitsu Mitsu with whose heart he was working now Her heart of flesh *Her only heart And if it did not work then for Mitsu* nothing Nothing ever more The total blackness Was that the end Was that all there would be?

And whatever he might learn from her today whatever he would find in the way of patching sick hearts and arteries and veins would not be of any use *to her if she were to die Or would there be a* voice in the dizzy blackness beyond to say to her whose ears would be filled with a single roaring silence Thanks Mitsu Thank you for dying

The ghost of a chance he had told Dido But she would die anyhow At most she s got six months and probably not that long If it were important that she live these six months I wouldn t do it But there is nothing for her anyway but sickness and pain Better that she die in the hospital than drop dead at home with one of her babies in her arms And it might work

And Dido had pleaded with him Don t do it Dave she had said Let someone else operate if it is best she go through with it. Let Taikkes cut into her He knows more than you do Don t do it with your own hands Don t kill her Dave don t kill that poor girl like that!

He was angry then I m not killing anyone he said I m trying to save her and if she were the king s daughter I d still do it in the

will be dead and I am young I have to learn

Why don t you try it on some rich guy then somebody not quite so sick? she said. Maybe he d live and you d learn from him

He had turned away his eyes black with anger Are you presuming to tell me what to do?

That afternoon she had gone to the hospital to see Mitsu On the way she had stopped in a florist shop and had bought some roses fat round pink roses and tall white roses and roses on long stems like show girls in parades and had them wrapped up in a package almost as big as she was so she had trouble carrying them in the wind She had entered the ward with the huge bouquet in her arms and found Mitsu without difficulty Because she was in the coloured ward hers the only pale face in the long row of patient dark ones and because she was lighter than the others or perhaps because she was the sickest of them all they had given her the good bed the one near the window

But Dido could not stand seeing all those faces turn toward the flowers so she asked the nurse for five vases and she had put a few in each and placed some beside each woman. They greeted her in silent astonishment and one of them asked her what she was

doing and who she was She was the Ladies Aid she said and laughed a little because that was true wasn t it? She was aiding to cheer them up wasn t she and she was a lady now come what may and what if the lady got spanked? But she stayed a little beside Mitsu and talked to her asking her about the children Hydeo who was four and such a rough strong boy always playing with guns and little Sammie who was five months old and so cute and fat who d always been too heavy for her

She had cried last night when she got home cried and argued with Dave but it had done no good and then she didn t mention her name to him any more Mitsu She had cried as she was crying now but it was no use What was done was done It was now ten o clock.

5

MITSU WATANABE had re-entered Petra s life five days previously It had started with a telephone call At the end of the day at the office Petra had dismissed her last patient sent her secretary home and was smoking a leisurely cigarette while waiting for Virginia Carroll to finish her cases Virginia had many more patients than she had She had been practising a good many more years and in

made enough last year to have over two thousand dollars tax to pay come March fifteenth and the wonder of that achievement softened the harshness of the financial blow

She was good A woman had to be good to make that kind of money in internal medicine especially when one out of each four or five patients did not pay Taikkes had helped of course getting her on the cardiac clinic at Musurus but if he hadn t she might have made it on her own Oh well let s be honest she might not have made it alone she probably would not have But she would have made women and children s clinics or Dekker s or any one of seven or eight other heart groups in town Besides while the money was good and important it was far from being the whole story The point was it had been an awfully hard pull For a smart woman and one who got on all right with people she had had more stumbling blocks to detour than anyone she could think of but she had made it and she was right where she wanted to be. And the taste of this success was hot and sweet after all she had gone through with Herb It was no longer painful to think of Herb and of their life together down in Howard It didn t hurt any more It was almost fun to dream of meeting him of being called by

him again as he still did from time to time Thursday Why no impossible. I have my conference. Sunday then? Too bad I have to fly to St Louis for the College of Physicians meeting I m sorry Herb I m a very busy woman

Yes she knew she was very foolish, that daydreaming which is cute at seventeen is very silly at thirty-seven If it was necessary to her that Herb should know she was a good doctor a successful one, it would be much more honest to pick up the phone dial long distance and talk to him Tell him simply straightforwardly that she wanted him to know how fine things were with her now no matter how terrible that last year in Howard had been and that there was no resentment, no more anger in her heart for him.

And that Mrs Diller had told her today that she had seen him Herb driving around with a smart, dark-eyed young chick and what the hell?

Petra slid her feet to the floor crushed her cigarette in the ash tray and the suddenly familiar number rang itself into her brain Howard, 694. person to person. Why not why not, Petra? He d be surprised to hear from her after four years—so what? Was there anything embarrassing about wanting to hear his voice again about wanting to know what he was doing with the rest of his life that life she had sworn would belong to her and to her only?

Six twenty He would be home in the pleasant little house into which Mother Nichols had moved after Petra s departure She d be setting the table for supper probably taking a look at the raisin apple pie fragrant with cinnamon thickened with the savoury custard like sauce topping a meal of ham and home preserved wax beans and a side dish of corn and no nonsense about fancy salads or fancy dressings Mother Nichols was a cook who believed in right tasting dishes and not in calorie charts or vitamin lists. And her skin was tight on her face and she still had her teeth.

Sorry said Virginia Carroll, peeking through the door I won t be through for a while. Do you want to go on to the restau rant by yourself and I ll join you later

I ll wait, said Petra. I m right comfortable. I think I ll call up Herb

Not Herb for heaven s sake said Virginia. You don t want

to start that all over again Petra look out you re slipping She stared at her one moment, unbelievingly then her angular face broke into a smile

You re right said Petra I am slipping It wouldn t work. There s no sense to it

And to herself she said dreamily Howard 694 And felt her heart swell intolerably in her chest because obediently the phone began to ring

But it wasn t Herb after all Naturally it couldn t be It was a high staccato woman s voice which blended the whine of the Middle West with the harsh consonants of a language whose words had been forgotten while the rhythm remained Miss Raditch Frieda head nurse of the women s surgical wards at Charity Hospital the hospital where Petra had interned years before when Taikkes was still surgical consultant and where she had first met him

Raditch Petra cried out and out of the past again the thin paper white face the worn angry eyes the exasperated always exasperated and harassed expression of Miss Raditch rose again Raditch, what on earth does she ever want of me?

Hello darling she said into the phone and remembering an April first joke she had perpetrated on the old nurse Any Siamese twins on the surgery schedule today?

Raditch s voice was as shrill as ever I haven t time to reminisce just now Dr Petrie (Still sour about it are you Raditch old goat, you old she-goat are you?) I have a patient here in ward four who s asking for you I have told her you aren t on the staff over here that you never even come to see your old friends any more but she is getting ready to kick the bucket and I thought I d try anyway and then tell her I ve done my best

But what are you talking about? said Petra Who s the patient and why does she want me?

As usual, Raditch was speaking in her capsule-form shorthand of facts which took twice as long to unwind.

Lo40 a heart anomaly You did a Caesarean four years ago Found in syncope at Bloomingdale s last week. Brought her here to be scheduled for surgery when she gets around to sign consent. Very apprehensive.

What s her name? said Petra

Watanabe said Raditch Mitsu Watanabe You wouldn t remember her Then regretfully yielding the last clue A Jap she said

But I do remember said Petra Of course I remember A Caesarean under local She wasn t a bit scared then but I was simply petrified

Yes said Raditch. I ll tell her you can t come that s right, isn t it?

I ll be there said Petra hastily Unofficially of course Just to say hello Raditch hello are you there?

The phone clicked in her ear

She hung up Petra said to herself Can you beat that cut me off in the middle of a sentence the old termagant!

If I follow you correctly said Virginia she spent the sum of ten cents to call you on behalf of a patient Correct me if I m wrong

You re right said Petra Keep going

I ll be damned And the patient is back at the old stand in need of further surgery and wants you to fix up the job you botched in *the infancy of your art?*

Not quite said Petra. I think she is quite ill and Raditch hopes I can boost her up a bit Enough to face surgery more cheerfully The Japanese you know don t like hospitals the way we do

Well for heaven s sake said Virginia don t stand there sucking your fingers Are you coming to dinner or are you going to

it off

p

Herb she said

The elevator door opened and closed behind the two women

I'll call him up she repeated looking into Virginia's face I

ng her
critical
comments for shrewd diagnosis but not for love not for kisses. "Will you describe your symptoms to him so he'll agree to come to the rescue?

The automatic elevator came to a stop Petra went through the lobby her mouth dry her eyes hard. Yes she said "I will. And he'll come I know he will. There is nothing dishonourable about it you know Virginia. He was my husband after all. You've been settled in your own marriage for years and years, haven't you? You don't remember what it is to be alone!

Virginia slipped her arm through Petra's. But I've never been alone sweet she said. I've never had to be When Chuck proposed I meant to make a go of it. I did. I would have with Herb I'm a simple soul—not like you. A peasant huh?

You're all right said Petra.

They went out into the street crossing it to the parking lot where Petra's car was waiting I think I'd better go to Charity now she said to Virginia. Where 'll I drop you?

I am coming with you said Virginia. In the mood you're in I'm not letting you run around alone An ounce of prevention"

Get in said Petra Do you mean I'm in a mood? What a bore! I didn't know it myself

That was the trouble in associating exclusively with women. There was no disguise no reticence None of the mind, none in the body And most terrible of all not about the naked heart. If you pause in your work and look out the window and your cigarette keeps on burning in the ash tray there they are with Midol and an order to lie down. If you have a headache they retrace your steps of the night before and call off the names of the men you have seen or dreamed of. Young or old all must die and you come to accept death as you accept fibroids cataracts the sudden melting of your features the dripping of your cheeks into your neck, once clean and solid you accept the breakdown of the skin, first on your

mother s face then sooner than you thought on your own But how can you accept another woman s knowledge of your desires your heart beating its needs with each systole the intolerable naivety of the heart young and surprised? How can you say with out being ridiculous with the crass and clownish ridiculousness of love I thought I could be a woman or not as I chose and I was wrong? I am like the others First and above all I am a woman Afterwards and secondly and infinitely beyond the essential in as *much as I can be anything else I am also a doctor Later on when* there is time

The car slid easily into the evening traffic What is Herb doing? asked Virginia I mean seriously of course Isn t he married yet?

No said Petra It was hard to say but she said it He is going the rounds with another woman

And you ll take him away from her?

If I can

What about Taikkes asked Virginia suddenly

Yes said Petra Poor Taikkes

Would you have married him if he d asked you?

Petra manœuvred the car into the inside lane and then skilfully made the turn What business is it of yours? she asked finally relaxed now hands quiet on the wheel Why do you ask me things I don t ask myself Have I asked you how many abortions you ve performed or whether you ve ever had any yourself

For goodness sake what s come over you? said Virginia I can *answer that right now None and neither have you I hope* I ask you about Taikkes because I like you and because I want to know

Do I ask you whether you married your first lover or your third or fourth one or have you kept count?

You re hysterical said Virginia quietly Let s stop right here Petra I can get a cab at the corner

With pleasure said Petra braking to a stop And further more——

And furthermore said Virginia a half grain of phenobarbitol and repeat in four hours if necessary I don t think it will be You look exhausted

You can stop loving You can stop loving this particular man

You have remembered? In time he'll fade the color of his eyes will [illegible] the touch of his hand the [illegible] of [illegible]

you will smile upon him as you [illegible] you smiled at him when he was still a stranger But who will deliver you Petra who will deliver you from the necessity of love from the pain and foolishness of love from the nakedness and the helplessness of love? When will you be a woman like other women a woman like Marjorie or Virginia or Inez or Joan a woman who answers when she is wanted but neither yearns nor seeks?

The twenty fourth year said the psychologists was the sexual peak of the love life of a woman That was a laugh. Wasn't it a laugh now really? Twenty four and then thirty She had become thirty and then thirty four and now she was thirty-seven and there was nothing the matter with her The psychologists were crazy They should have their heads examined. Because now she knew that twenty four is not the peak. It is the valley the bottom of the mountain And do you go on climbing that way or do you reach a plateau somewhere or does love transform its needs when it has passed the seduction stage? When women alone stop being attractive do they turn then with love to cats and politics? With love with the same violence the same rending of the soul?

Why was she deceived? Why had they not warned her the psychologists the neurologists the textbooks the teachers the lawyers that a woman did not with impunity divorce her husband her perfectly satisfactory husband just because of a career? The career can be circumvented and the husband tamed at last but not the need for love And not for love alone not for the bed alone but for being two easily comfortably without need to pretend a youth that is not important any more without being seductive without being aggressive. To be the woman of one man who will wear the shirts you washed and drink the coffee you made who at night will tell you the story of his day so you won't miss anything he has been while he was away from you

And if you are divorced you may as well face it now Petra since you've yielded once—and then again and again to Taikkes

—there will be other men in your life whom you will take and leave and what becomes of you then the real you the proud you who s never been bested who would not be toyed with? What will happen to the woman you dreamed of in your childhood the woman serene accomplished creative?

But I was a child then and my image had no womb

The steady eyes steady heart the woman with the dark smooth hair divided in the middle the woman in the white coat, passing among the rows of beds a stethoscope in her pocket Go on that was Joyce Jordan woman M D every day Monday to Friday Who do you think you are now you soap-opera figure divorcing your man and then five years and a lover later calling him back to you because someone saw him taking out a smart dark-eyed chick? A smart looking chick with dark eyes After having had me after being married to me and while I am here still unattached of a divided mind Steady-eyed steady hearted

No not steady hearted Is anything steady that is live? Does not the wind bounce and break it doesn t the day bend and brace it? Is anything live ever unchanging? Don t you need a cast about your heart as you do around a broken femur or a broken tibia after the heart has once been entered and possessed? Is there any digitalis for steadying and slowing the rhythm of your love can you dope and dull it with so many drops and so many tablets? Is there a mirror a speculum or a plate to tell you when it is fused strong again and you can bear to look upon a man with interest with quiet solicitude without love?

Virginia the simple soul the simple life

Why me why me? Why did you do this to me? Bleating like an idiot as though you had cancer

What s the matter with you? You getting bashful? Raditch,

to turn around recognize her voice and the belligerent bite of her heels on the floor before she was back behind the steam table on wheels

Here let me help you But Nurse Raditch was already out of her grasp furiously wheeling the sloshing jugs and her rattling trays toward the far end of the ward Aren t you going to say hello? said Petra breathlessly

My goodness seventy beds seventy trays twelve paralytic dinners one blind woman two hands and I have to say Good evening Doctor sit down Doctor cream or lemon in your nose, Doctor

What can I do?

Get out of my skirts that s what you can do Don t get mad, Doctor I m glad you re here You re beautiful always beautiful to me Tall and beautiful More Petra than ever You re happy!

Without waiting for an answer she scooped the vegetables at the bottom of the soup jug and distributed them roughly among the half filled cups then started down the row of beds She turned sharply and pointed with her spoon 'There she said. Bed nineteen Smallest woman around.

Petra followed her gesture then crossed the room. She stood a moment at the foot of the bed trying to fuse together the woman she had known and the patient who was staring at her

Then the woman smiled Her lips already parted on the half open mouth drew more sharply away from the arching almond-shaped teeth Her breathing was short and shallow in spite of the piled up pillows that lifted her nearly erect. But when she spoke though her voice was veiled the distant Mitsu of the past came into sharp focus My friend, she said my good friend Dr Lettrie Her dark face moved in the frame of the coarse woven pillow You came just for me?

I was glad to come said Petra. She sat down You were going to come and see me remember?

The woman shrugged Children she said. You know how it is with children Who can I leave the children with?

Talk, you fool say something Stop thinking that thought stop twisting that thought around Who will I leave the children with? Stop holding your breath to time your rhythm with hers You came her to encourage her to bring her cheer

How are the children?

The woman smiled So good she said So big!

Miss Raditch brought the tray down sharply between Petra and Mitsu Feed her! she said

Petra smoothed the bed sheets and straightened the perilous angle of the tray *Does Miss Raditch scare you?* she asked

No said Mitsu. Nobody can scare me now but the doctors They scare me They want to operate you know

Here said Petra let me help you with this Miss Raditch scares me

Slowly she spooned the tepid broth in which swam yesterday s left-overs into the lips of the sick woman And noting that each spoonful left Mitsu breathless she talked without pause to fill the gaping the gasping silence

Miss Raditch is all right she said The trouble with her is nobody takes her seriously She s been here so long she knows as much as the chief superintendent and as much as the chief surgeon and more than the cook or the purchasing office ever hope to remember But she is too little to be taken seriously And every body steps on her

Mitsu nodded

But that doesn t mean she isn t smart continued Petra Another spoon of soup another cracker bite That s good. She s so thin you can see it going down Hasn t anyone fed this poor girl since she s been here? How long have you been here Mitsu?

Five days I fainted——

Don t talk. You are eating

That s better Your voice is becoming stronger You ve swal lowed that immense apple of anguish that was caught in your throat. You ve pushed back into your empty skull the rush of tears that came into your eyes You re normal now a doctor chatting with a patient not a woman looking into the eyes of another *woman and seeing the ruin of her own image*

We ll work on the noodles now

You re good

You aren t eating me. The noodles are good

Nobody s helped me with the food.

How could they darling? Don t break down, push them back

don t think of her don t think of you don t think of love Were you complaining about love on the way here? Don t think of the children. Get her out of here that s the thing They are so busy Poor Raditch would never get through.

Did she call you?

Carrots now Yes she called. She said would I come and see my old friends And I said no She said would I come and have a short beer with her? And I said sorry She said—— Open your mouth Mitsu

Mitsu s head fell back against the rough pillow Wait, she said. Petra waited trying not to look anxious The woman s breath was so shallow it could not possibly get down into her lungs Did I feed you too fast?

Mitsu made a sign no Then I want you to see my kids pictures she said. They re in my locker Locker nineteen. Will you look?

No said Petra I ll go and take a look at your kids while you re in here and see they are kept well fed and clean Would you like me to do that?

Mitsu smiled unbelievingly You wouldn t do it she said. Then she pushed away the spoon and the cup No more she said.

Petra put the tray away Milk?

No

A few sucking breaths between words between phrases. A contraction the suspense of pain the mouth opened wider and then like a small child the burp Mitsu s lids closed one moment then she took Petra s hand and drew it against her body Feel, she said. Can you feel the bump?

Her tight little hand with the too long nails—didn t anyone ever bother to trim their nails?—pressed Petra s hand between the hard shrunken breasts Do you feel that bump? she said. All the doctors come in to look at it. Do you know what it is?

Yes said Petra there is a little swelling there

But do you know what the swelling is?

Mitsu s eyes were bright under the pinched in lids challenging Petra to gloss over that if she could to push it back into nothingness with one of the long meaningless medical words to treat it

with the easy casualness of a woman who has two colds a year and some years the flu and need not ever be concerned with the lump coming through the wall of her chest the lump made by the blown up heart pushing the ribs forward out of bounds

Petra looked away The patient in the next bed was eating greedily disregarding fork and knife her shaking fingers fumbling at the food her mouth extended bestially like a trunk.

Yes said Petra I know what it is I know how it can be fixed

But it s my heart! cried Mitsu in her raucous breathless voice *How can they fix it if it s my heart?*

The woman in the next bed stopped her hand midway to her mouth, a bit of lettuce oozing its dressing drop by drop on the rough and spotted sheet She paused and lifted her head anxiously in the direction of the cry her eyes opened wide as though trying to see through the scarred corneas and the pupils that were blind

It s my heart that s bulging said Mitsu That s what the doctor said That s what it is isn t it? Her tone had malice and triumph in it Now you are bested it said now I ve got you at the end of your string and sinisterly in terror it s death itself that s

,

else they'll call

she said. I ll

pretend——

Be still said Petra and sat on the edge of the bed her arm around the little body the nine-year-old figure and pressed it gently against her breast as she would a child and as a child would Mitsu relaxed against her Don t you trust your doctor Mitsu?

I didn t say that I trusted you remember? I wasn t scared at all

Why should you be scared now silly? Stop snivelling Mitsu, I m not scolding you It s perfectly natural to be scared Everybody who gets in a hospital is scared and then when it is over they say wasn t that silly how scared I was Why the worst was the scare I had Afterwards they s y it wasn t a bit bad

I wouldn t be scared if it was you who did the cutting

But darling I am not a surgeon!

You are too said Mitsu pulling away so as to face her It s you who pulled me through, it s you who got my baby out.

I m not that kind of a surgeon Mitsu said Petra. But don t worry Mitsu I ll get you the best surgeon there is And now relax, dear Stop thinking about it. I promise everything will be all right.

She rose picked up the tray and carried it to the end of the ward where the cart was standing The ambulatory patients who were able brought their own the others were picked up eventually and removed. Petra waited for her turn slammed the tray down with the same good humoured gesture with which the patients slammed theirs and then ran down the hall following the rattle of another cart She found Nurse Raditch at last in the fracture ward, wheeling the lame to feed the paralyzed until everyone had some fair chance of getting to his food

Did you pound some sense in her? she asked Petra and then Wait don t talk in here I m too busy Can t you call me later?

I just want to ask you who s her surgeon?

How do I know? I suppose Banks would do her He s a good boy a third year resident but that s not the type of case you get to see every day

Has he done any chest surgery?

Chest, yes Heart no I doubt we ve had that kind of heart since he got here. Petra you re a good egg Why do you think I got you to come so I could kill a couple of hours with you? Get that girl out of here Please Petra That s all I ask of you I can t stand her any more Every day she gets smaller and thinner Every morning her eyes have sunk farther back in her head every day her breath gets faster and faster I don t even take her pulse any more I don t count her breaths I can t any more It gives me the willies I ve lost my nerve And she looks at me you know how she looks like it was time you did something about her like she d been good and she d waited quietly and she didn t make a fuss but would somebody please save her life while it was still time

Shut up will you said Petra You don t have to smear it on that thick.

No I mean it Can you do something Petra? Can you find one of your fancy specialists to do her for nothing and send her back

She is such a little bit of a thing said Raditch again after a silence Just like a child. It hurts Well I said all I could think of and it didn t work did it?

You know it has said Petra But how? You don t want to [illegible] d ask Taikkes

6

SIX MONTHS ago it would have been very easy to ask Taikkes Six months ago she would not have had to wait like this in the drawing room at the right of the entrance alone and formal in the middle of the contorted Louis XV furniture under the outwardly commiserating but secretly and not too well disguised triumphan eye of the old Italian butler Umberto had at last reduced her to the rank where he wanted her to be Petra the alms-seeker th demander of favours the kindly middle-aged woman with a spreading beam who comes in to ask the famous surgeon to use his influence for a deserving case a woman ill poor young a widow with two small children

She need not have put herself in this ridiculous situation She could have entered, using her key She still had her key after all. The breach between Taikkes and herself had never been open and final. As the saying went, they were still friends She could have come in looked for him and then finding him gone scribbled a message for him and gone out. And to hell with Umberto and his unctuous regrets

Better yet she should have phoned. She had a patient who through some mischance had landed at Charity Hospital and was in urgent need of special surgery She would like him Taikkes to do the surgery And would he use his influence to have the woman admitted at Musurus in one of the free beds? That was awfully nice of him Yes indeed she Petra was extremely grateful

Umberto came into the drawing room his step gliding and springing his youthful step his youthful bearing polished and brought forth for the occasion pulled out of the dark compartment of the past when to be a good butler meant being a good

and graceful juggler and not a confidant not the nurse and the protector and the friend Umberto was carrying a tray with thin sandwiches and the good sherry He had meant then to help and console He wasn t gloating about the defeat of his rival In the Lover versus Butler contest she had won the first round but he had won the field again and although the battle had not been open between the two of them it was he Umberto who had secured *the spoils it was he who owned the Master now after the flight of* the Son and the defeat of the Lover

I thought you might like some sherry It is cold tonight

Thank you she said and watched him pour it carefully turning away from her a little so that she should not notice the slight palsy of the right hand steadied as though accidentally by the left She noticed though and turned her eyes away and saw that he had *combed his hair the iron black hair streaked by the cuts of the* brush and comb the dark coarse Italian hair so much younger than the liver-coloured face and the dull lack lustre eyes

She took the glass from him Thank you Umberto she said I will drink this and then leave You will tell Dr Taikkes that I was here and would like him to call me as soon as he can

He waited bent a little not obsequiously but waiting so she *continued I need his help to get a patient in the hospital. It is an* urgent case but there are no free beds at Musurus

He straightened up Yes he said I will tell him. He looked distressed He should be back soon Any moment now——

That s all right said Petra It s enough that he should know I should have called——

No no he said surprisingly He hesitated visibly torn between *the deaf mutism of the good servant and the intolerable need to* soothe and assuage and save of the Butler Lover You should wait he said He looked at her anxiously and then very quickly he went out of the room The door closed with the finality of a cell gate Petra who was putting on her gloves sat back nonplussed Umberto had decided she was to wait and wait she must

But that s silly she thought I can go if I want to I don t have to *wait just because Umberto wants me to*

She pulled off her gloves and poured herself another glass of

sherry Yes it was the good sherry the one tha Taikkes had to call for twice when there were guests p esent the bottle that Umberto reserved for the master The sandwich was crabmeat. She lifted the top layer and investigated. Yes flaked crabmeat, mayonnaise and chopped watercress her favourite tea sandwich. Why was Umberto trying to ingratiate himself with her? What was the matter with Umberto? Rather of course what was the matter with Taikkes?

The telephone rang was answered then later rang again. Time stretched. Petra had finished the sandwiches She had had no dinner yet and it was after nine o clock. She was drinking too much of Umberto s precious sherry Her eyes were heavy and yet there was the harassing fact of Mitsu s problem before her It was urgent, it had to be decided at once It could not wait. The woman would be dismissed from Charity Hospital since she refused surgery They needed her bed for people who could and would be saved. Would she stand the trip home the probable stairs the confusion and the stresses of a small household with small children where every dollar that s spent is a decision of importance? She should be spared the strain of all decisions where every scolding and slap received by her children while she lay helpless was a scolding and a slap for her Could she stand this and then brace herself for heart surgery?

I doubt it thought Petra. It is now right away or not at all. And the best surgeon possible not a resident, exhausted from too much surgery in too short a time who finds for the first time that an aorta with an aneurysm is a fragile aorta.

Where was Taikkes and what was he doing?

What business was that of hers or of Umberto s after all? She glanced at her watch again It was nearly ten o clock. This was really silly She should go home There were other cats to whip as the French said. In all fairness to her other patients—

As though he had heard the light scraping of her chair on the rug Umberto was here again He held a magazine in his hands band uncut the supreme effort She remembered the disapproval with which he accepted her correction when she had first spent the night at Taikkes apartment. Miss Petrie, he had said there s

a phone call for you She had taken the phone call and then later It is Dr Petrie she had said And he had repeated Dr Petrie Doctor? as though such behaviour was not to be expected from a doctor From a cheap woman yes from an Italian street walker yes from an American show girl yes but never no matter where *or in what country from a woman consecrated with the same title* as his master

Now for the first time in the two years he was acknowledging her status he was allowing her her degree her superior knowledge her participation in the holy of holies Like a dog bearing a toy with the same look of demanding hope in the bloodshot eyes he was bringing the *A M A Journal* fresh from the mail unopened *received today*

She should speak to him she should ask what is the matter with the master Umberto? What is it that I can do about it?

She need not even ask she need only look at him kindly The words were hot in his mouth he was anxious to speak he was eager

She got up I am leaving Umberto she said I will call him up *in the morning*

Dr Petrie——

His head fell to one side and the slight agitation of the hand became obvious frightening But Umberto was not trying to hide it any more His hands were shaking but whether from Parkinson s from fear or from need of her the vanquished the defeated or [illegible]

Umberto I didn t come away from her shaking his head more violently with a gesture of rejection of denial But I didn t really she said *I came to ask him a favour and it will* have to wait now until morning

But the doctor will be angry

The doctor will be angry at me if he has to be angry I don t think he will

Don t go said Umberto Don t go Dr Petrie

She should ask him why She should inquire But it did not matter any more It had not been love really it had been a play

it had been a game The game was over It had been over six months ago It was over so long ago and so thoroughly that look Umberto she was not afraid to come here again as though she was a stranger as though her name was Hindersmith or Carpenter She wasn t afraid of love she wasn t even aware of love any more. Love is a theatre convention that rule of Aristotle that governs the plays of the stage in which lovers take other men s wives. Unity of scene of time and of love As though there was unity of anything in the world as though anything even flesh to flesh could ever be made one as though even the child within the mother s own body was not darkly in the fright of his own blind kingdom starting his own revolt

If she had borne Taikkes a child he would have the right to her love but he had refused to let her bear his child. Just as she had refused to bear Herb s until later until they were settled, until it had aged and withered in the realm of their desire until there was no child to be had since there was no love

Thirty seven years old If she had believed in Herb their child would be in school this year their child would be ripening for love. Her life would be the quiet routine half humorous half tender of a love without urgency or anguish or pity or fear

What is the matter with Dr Taikkes Umberto? she said because Herb notwithstanding Taikkes was and would continue to be the man for her the only one in whose arms love was more than a release or a game or a promise too hard to keep another day another day another day

Is he ill?

No said Umberto It is worse If he is sick to the stomach or if he is sick here or here or if he coughs it s all right. He is a doctor he knows what syrup he should take and how many days he stays in bed But Dr Petrie he is sick of the sickness of the soul since his son has left. He tells me one day he goes away another day I go away Me I should go away I should die away from him? Listen he says to me he buys me a house in Naples he goes to Naples and stays there playing the mandolin No he is not crazy at all he just says that But why? You re a doctor too Can you say why can you do something? Is there a medicine?

No Umberto said Petra I am sorry there is no medicine There is nothing I know to do about that illness There is nothing any doctor can do when a man gets sick in his soul.

A doctor no said Umberto Then shyly reluctantly with the crafty smile of an aging child The doctor no but maybe the lady?

But that was over It had been over months ago And like an alcohol or a sedative addiction from which, after an interminable struggle one wakes up one day and knows that the struggle is *finished and the battle won it was finished with Taikkes and love* did not matter in the least any more Now it was possible to return to Herb with perfect sincerity and start again where they had left off five years ago not with the hope of loving again, but with honesty and wholeheartedness since that was what he wanted and so far in life she had paid so little attention to Herb his needs his wishes and to be perfectly frank, his rights Perhaps that was what he had loved most about her

Stop daydreaming Petrie she told herself harshly This man s *asking you something Answer him*

But while she had turned away from him he quietly had gone away again his arrow shot his point made As fast as his silent feet would carry him he had dashed out of the room again hoping that if she were left alone she could not argue with herself or with him and would be there whenever the master returned

The room was growing colder She went into the hall lifted the thermostat indicator a couple of notches and fetched her Persian lamb coat from the closet Inside the powder room she looked at *her face* with gravity She needed *some repair* work badly the sooner the better No use frightening Taikkes with this particular face the face as he had told her once of a woman who had seen everything She brushed her short blonde hair forward then throwing her head back let it fall into its natural parting I am still beautiful she thought but it won t be long now Still holding the lipstick to her mouth, she went into the library where the full

She looked at t

at the thoughtful

well being

nd should not be

condemned but the truth was the truth no matter at what stage of the game—had apparently made a very poor wife to her husband and a worse mother Little Garth in a cu e suit of the late nineteen twenties protectively held in the folds of his mother s moire dress which half-covered his high bare legs had a singular and most unchildlike stare on his delicate face so like h rs in the high round forehead the high bridged nose The painter had caught something of their personalities in the likeness of the turn

husband and father the diffidence the ravished pride since there was no translatable language

With Petra there had been no submission no ravishment There had been only the full recognition of each in th other s life almost as if they had known each other before and lost to each other had not known the day nor the place of the meeting had gone on unwaiting unhoping for the coincidence of their chance encounter

of the figures for a single dimension effect She had met him in her third year of medical school when she entered Charity as a surgical clerk. At that time Taikkes was still on the Charity Hospital staff a position he had given up last year after Garth had left Damn Garth she thought furiously Was it necessary for him to become so damn holy nd gently and nobly drive his father to hell? Anyway she was surgical clerk and he was chief surgeon They had met over the open belly of a Negro cook who had been repeatedly stabbed by a crazed waiter in a Times Square cafeteria Who did this to you? Taikkes had asked the man sweating the death sweat of shock and of receding consciousness and the swollen broken lips had answered as each of the victims always answered the expected and unchanging words A friend.

The man had been brought in at the end of the Friday afternoon surgicals and the chief resident was to take over but Taikkes had pushed him aside No son he had said. He has no time to lose.

You might not do it fast enough. The resident had turned away from the table with an angry jerk of the head. He was a nice boy bull necked and round of head with dark snapping eyes a boy self made and sound active and jealous of his skill. This was his case and he wanted it and he was disappointed not to be allowed to handle it As he moved away from the table in anger Taikkes raising his eyes one moment from the wound met Petra s eyes freshly blue and eagerly grateful above her mask since there was no one else there to be grateful for the wounded. Tell him to come back and watch Taikkes had told her and she said Give him a few minutes to wear it off A few minutes? he said and she had smiled Yes she said. Ten minutes at most Taikkes had slid the omentum lid into the wound and identified the first of the seven bowel openings that he was to find and sew up that night You know him well? he asked. No she said not too well Well he said how do you know about the ten minutes And to the nurse Kelley please

Petra knew what he was asking but pretended to misunderstand. He is really very thrilled at being on your service she said. What was the boy s name the boy who had started them toward each other as if accidentally because somebody had to Arnheim—was that his name?—Arnheim, Bob Arnheim and he was doing his stuff in Portland now where he had come from He was married. She had had a Christmas card from him last year showing his wife s picture inserted in a Christmas bauble his wife and each of his three children and the dog

He is very thrilled to be on your service she had said Taikkes had not replied just looked at her half angrily half beggingly Then because of the urgency of the case not the interns—what did he care what the interns thought of him or of her and as far as that was concerned what did she care what they thought?—he had said nothing more until three hours later Then he had given Arnheim the care of closing the incision and taking the case on to the discharged-cured phase knowing the kid had learned enough to handle the next case with luck.

And you he asked Petra taking her away from the table peel ing his rubber gloves off taut so taut that they were transparent,

are you pleased to be on my service? Do you want to become a surgeon too?

I am just a clerk Dr Taikkes she had said. I m not on your service I am just a floater

I know he told her Go change your clothes I ll take you home

It was nine o clock. When he had left her at one, she was exhausted furious humiliated but still a virgin. She was engaged to Herb his ring still felt foreign on her finger and if she had resisted Herb it wasn t to give herself to the first man who whistled. But it had been much more difficult to refuse Taikkes So difficult, to be truthful that Petra who was twenty three in June had let Herb advance the marriage date to the end of her clerk year instead of to the end of her medical studies the following June. This had messed up the last year thoroughly The final exams had been a horror There were no brilliant improvisations in neuro-surgery no flights of fancy in pharmaceutical practice. The antibiotics were just coming into their own that year and demanded more intelligence than the textbooks had assumed of the reciprocal action of bacteria on bacilli on moulds on tissues

She d made it though and thought her troubles had come to an end when after her honeymoon satisfied calmed down at last and a woman she had returned to New York for her internship She had thought it perfectly safe to chance Charity again now that she was married and had a husband to protect her against the insults that might—might?—be addressed to her But there had been no insults No demands no more struggles Nothing more than an occasional oblique reference to strong women cheap and crude, and his lingering glance upon her But it was the unexpected which had happened It was she who violently uncontrollably had fallen in love with him Yes what about Herb and their honeymoon? Herb had been the catalyst that was all whereby the need for Taikkes had exploded inside her For four years she had fought against it until at last the residency finished she had returned to Howard with Herb and started practice there Taikkes now resolutely forgotten she had decided to give her all to marriage and to her medical career

The trouble of course was that she had not succeeded Try as she might and she had tried it would take longer than she had patience for to convince Herb that she was no less a woman for being a doctor and convincing Herb s clients and hers that she was no less a doctor for being a woman Eventually with the death of Bonnie Hurd in that dreadful polio year she had lost She had pulled up her stakes from both suburbia and from married life with relief and with horror Never she had promised herself never would she so divide herself again She would be first what she loved first herself as a doctor She would remain in a large city where a skirt does not alter the opinion that people have of your judgment or of your knowledge She would have love too not as a sacrament but as a food And arriving in New York she had gone straight to Taikkes

Tears rose to her eyes She had never stopped loving him What was she doing her fists in her eyes like a lovesick peasant girl what was she doing huddled in the deep armchair the coat she had received from him across her shoulders waiting for him to come *home from goodness knew what strange rendezvous so that she* might tell him she did not love him any more that she was going back to Howard to Herb? Was that why she had come? Was that the reason why she was here? No there was something else Remember Petra remember Doctor Dr Petrie remember your patient Mitsu Watanabe the aneurysm case

Mitsu! she thought wearily I had forgotten

Heavily she wrapped the coat around her shoulders and strode out of the library

In the drawing room drinking sherry out of her glass Taikkes was standing waiting for her

7

SHE SAW his fatigue almost before she saw him Taikkes standing in the doorway saw his surprise at finding her there so late at night awaiting him And she saw his hesitation as to how to greet her whether as the woman he had known and slept with and loved or as the doctor he met now and then in his rounds at the hospital the doctor he had trained and advised and treated with rough camaraderie and ironical but none the less real deference since she was bright and willing to work like a horse She saw also his embarrassment in feeling himself so beaten and undone and so she took the initiative and went quickly to him making her face happy and blank and unconcerned as she would before a patient with an incurable wound

I m so glad you ve come she said I was about to go I was afraid your dignified Umberto would throw me out

I ve come he said I ve come I always sleep in my own bed. You know that. Sit down he said with false joviality sit down, Doctor and tell me what s on your mind Or did you come just to see me?

No she said I m strong I have just come to ask a favour

He let himself down heavily beside her on the davenport Good he said. That s fine Be a good girl and tell Umberto I want some coffee Hot milk and sugar Umberto! he roared

Petra went to the door Bring him some coffee Umberto she told the old servant Hot milk and sugar Yes I ll have some too Black. It s cold in here

She came back to Taikkes and he pulled her down beside him Because she was so tall he did not like to stand beside her He liked her at his level cut down to his size his great shaggy head above hers But having her beside him he turned away from her

She felt his restlessness and regretted having waited for him. He looked thin His voice was forced. His face bore two deep trenches as though he had been clawed and scarred There was about him a thin irritability that was not at all like him, that was disturbing

Well he said *what have you been up to?*

She took the glass of sherry from him and placed it on the table beside her *What do you mean what I have been up to?* she said You know perfectly well what I am doing By the way the clinic appointment went through. Thanks a lot I m happy about it

Bah he said that s nothing That isn t what I meant What are you doing with yourself? You I mean

I don t know she said Herb s name on the tip of her tongue but suddenly incongruous and unreal just now I don t know I haven t decided.

You ve been thinking about it all this time

You don t have to be polite she said and pretend to be interested in my private life I manage to survive somehow

Somehow That s good Yeah somehow I bet. I bet you do I bet you find a somehow he said and then stopped because Umberto was coming in with the coffee tray and crackers and Bel Paese He watched Petra get up anger rising in her f ce and walk away from him head high spine up and straight her whole back strong proud withheld going aw y from him with the affecting rhythm of a walk that was unlike the walk of any other woman a woman to be gathered received and nurtured the woman beside whom all other women were cheap merchandise tin pan music steerage

She was back Women don t leave all at once and forever They return and they leave again staying away a little longer each time *Petra was not like the others She could grow old and put on flesh* and fat and turn white and still the spirit within her would keep *burning hot and bright Yes But it was over She was not im*portant to him just now To keep her now would mean what to *do about her tomorrow how to get rid of her tomorrow of her* kindness of her concern The old complications To stay or not to stay *To marry her To be responsible for her happiness* When he could not pretend any more When he himself had no longer any

taste for happiness nothing more to give except his need of her warmth except for the shabby remains of the man he had been. When he could no longer be absorbed in her or anyone else when the only thought that absorbed him was what had happened to Garth and how he his father had let it happen to him.

Well he said out with it. What is it and what do you want?

He poured the hot milk into his coffee put in the sugar mixed it with his spoon and drank it down greedily the hot sweet drink comforting and quieting his rising impatience. What do you want? he said to her strong back since she was away from him now her head against the window

She told him It s a woman at Charity she said in a calm distant voice An old patient of mine a young woman with a giant aneurysm She s afraid of surgery out there I also am afraid of it for her There is practically no pulse in her legs I haven t seen the X rays but I m sure she is very close to the edge I wish you would take care of it.

You mean you want me to operate.

Yes she said

I m not at Charity any more, he said.

I know that she said You could get her transferred.

It s a hell of a lot of trouble

I know it she said

He said nothing for a while then Suppose she dies? he said.

Come she said aren t you willing to take a chance?

Whose case is she out there?

You know the residents she said. His name is Banks, Raditch says He is a good hand but they don t get an aneurysm every day It would be his first

I was pretty good as a resident he said. He spread both arms on the back of his chair He was feeling better The colour was returning to his cheeks I did some handsome surgery as a resident

I m sure you did she said

The best darned bladder repair I ever did was at Charity my second year on a lug of a truck driver who went and got himself killed in a crash the week after he was out

I know she said but they are not all Taikkeses out there

No he said darkly they aren t.

Damn she thought I said the wrong thing He ll start thinking about Garth again She returned and sat down beside him Do you want to be coaxed? she said.

He sighed No he said I ll take care of her Get her over to *Musurus for me Tell Social Service to put her in as my case I ll* have Dave take a look at her and work her up

But you ll do her yourself won t you? said Petra

You do care said Taikkes Friend of yours?

I delivered her first child said Petra She s Japanese You ll know how I feel when you see her She s so little and quiet and so scared

All right all right all right he said I ll do what I can Any

at him briefly and slipped out of the embrace She took down his hand and kept it in hers at her side

Yes she said I am doing what I want I guess I am happy

You are evading

I should be leaving she said

Well go he said Go go on. See the door s open Why did *you come in the first place?* Are you afraid *is that it* are you afraid of me?

But his hand was holding her wrist sharply without tenderness and though his eyes were fixed upon her with hard intention he was not listening to her answer He did not even hear his own words so that involuntarily as though speaking to the deaf she raised her

only to gr

what has c

Darling she said aloud you are tired you must rest You ve had a long day and you have your clinic tomorrow

What do you know about my day? he said in the same tone You don t know anything of me any more Is that why you came? To s e me to find me like this?

She did not answer and he pushed her away from him droppi g his hands on his knees and sighing Then h started swearing grossly as a child who wishes to be slapped

Stop it Taikker said Petra Get hold of yourself Don t let go like this Taikker what is the matter with you? What is wrong can t you tell me?

She put her hand on his shoulder and shook it lightly But he went on repeating over and over again the obscene words dully patiently without relish and without inflection Outsid the door Petra heard the faint shuffling of his manservant s cautious s ep Suddenly she was frightened.

Taikker! she cried Stop it I tell you! Stop!

He pulled away startled turned toward her and wi hdrew further to focus on her better because he did not have his glasses. It was as if he had not seen her at all and was only now recognizing her He grimaced then recognition and pain and the apology of his smile twisting the ridges of his face in a poignant and cruel caricature of the man she had known

What is it darling? she said her heart breaking within her Taikker darling what is it?

He sighed again profoundly this time as though released from an ignoble dream of terror Like a heavy child obese and unknowing he buried his face on her neck.

It s no good he said after a while Petra my dear it s no good it s no damn good at all. It s all wrong and you know it.

But what is wrong dearest?

It s all wrong It s wrong for you Even for you You should not be here You should not come back. Never never come back Never come back to me.

She started protesting She had not come back for him She had come back for someone else someone indistinct now and forgotten someone on a forgotten bed in a distant hospital someone weak, weaker now in her mind amorphous and dulling ebbing away Mitsu? Who was Mitsu? Had she worried about Mitsu? Who was Mitsu and what care of hers could she ever be and how could she Petra have ever felt the alien woman s pain and anguish when her whole self now was raw scraped fresh extended into this new

pain attached and grafted into a sorrow closer to her than her own flesh?

Mitsu?

Darling she said I had to come

He interrupted her with the pressure of his flat tipped fingers

curious tourists who come in to look at the place to look at the walls and the beds and the places where they killed and buried their love Oh Petra he said raising his face to her What do you know of love? How can you come back to me?

He pushed her away and put his head in his hands and then vords buried in his palms were in

know what sort of help He needs a sedative but what can a sedative do for him which will help him when he wakes up

and with all her might kneading the heavy layer of muscles until she felt him giving a little yielding a little under her hands

Dearest she said, soothingly in the quiet voice used with the sleeping patients who must be roused just a little just enough to turn in their beds or to swallow the pill dear it s all right we aren t fighting any more we aren t sking anything of each other I don t want anything of you you cannot give or do not wish to give *Dear dear Taikker can t you forget the foolish me and the foolish you* can t we forget the foolish people we have been can t we just be quietly and lovingly two people together without a con test and without a struggle?

Ha he said Lovingly quietly You?

Taikker she said look I have come to talk to you not to ask you to make love to me

When you come to me you are a beggar he said.

No she said I m not any more I was a beggar once darling, I came to you because you wanted me but mostly because I needed you I came as a beggar I was alone and I was frightened and I was in need and I am glad I came But it is over now I am not asking anything more

But you would if I d let you And I can t, I can t Petra.

I know she said soothingly

No you don t You don t even know what I am talking about, he said pulling away from her brusquely pushing himself straight upon the sofa I know what you think and you re wrong I am not incapable you know That isn t it

I didn t mean that, she said. She tried to laugh. It didn t occur to me

But it did. I can have women you know I can have a woman every night.

Oh for goodness sake she said don t be childish, Taikker What is it to me if you do or if you don t? That s your business, not mine

It is your business he said We loved together We were happy together We were so damn happy you wanted to marry me

No I did not she said I only asked you and you refused and I was glad you refused

You liar he said He was silent.

Outside the door there was the gentle pat pat pat of Umberto s coat rubbing against the door Outside the window there was the clear sharp high pitched wind swirling and banking against the pane Petra had never felt so lonely and so insignificant in her loneliness But the man who had been her lover was more lost than she and suffering more

I have no right he said at last I cannot start again a whole lifetime with you

I know she said I understand perfectly Taikker Marriage is more than love

No he said it isn t more than love It s a man and a woman he said after a moment It s a whole man and a whole

woman and it s the thing they make together It s a man and a woman and their daughter and their son The son of their youth *in the making growing something together outside of themselves* that is better than they have been It takes youth, youth, Petra Force Petra The things you have Hope, belief You know that don t you?

I love you he said and it struck hard because he had not said it before but there is youth still in you and none in me You aren t yet forty You are still a woman you still can grow a child inside your womb Go ask your husband for a son while you still can

Taikker she said my husband——

No he said don t tell me Your husband is a dumb dull guy That has nothing to do with it He ll take you Any man will take you gladly I am sorry he said dully that I have come between the two of you.

You haven t she said I had left him

Don t wait Petra he said Go while the going is good While you have something to give Every month is another month lost.

I wanted your child said Petra slowly I have never wanted a child from anyone but you And then remembering her wish to call up Herb an hour ago she stopped in surprise at her own words

He took her hand and patted it a minute silently His eyes were heavy and lost

I love you he said vaguely to the rug to the floor I love you but you must go away I love you but you must bear children All my *sons are dead Garth is dead to me and all the sons of Garth* are not to be Go away Petra go away my dear There is nothing that love can do for me any more Will you fo get me Petra my dear? Will you try to forget me your old teache your old lover?

Hospital.

8

GET AWAY! said Nick in a thick, anguished voice I ve got more than I can do

Petra looked at him in astonishment at his face red suddenly above the mask at his young awkward hands manipulating the breathing balloon with almost spastic contractions saw the growing tension of the tightened jaw the sudden jerking of his head, the instinctive squaring of the shoulders and understood. I wasn t wrong the other day she thought. I wasn t crazy I didn t imagine things That poor dope is in love with me Aloud in an even, measured voice she said I ll get Dr Sandstrom.

Dr Sandstrom having set up the spinal for the D & C. was in his office working with meticulous precision on his statistical anaesthesia charts which he was going to present in April for his Ph.D He took off the thick lens glasses without which his eyes were suddenly small and very tired and rubbed his face with his hands. All right he said I ll go It s the Japanese girl isn t it?

Yes said Petra It s a shame to pull you away from all your playthings but Surbu has his hands full. He hasn t been on the service very long

He came on in January said Sandstrom, and he s a bright boy He put away the triangle the compass and the rulers corked his ink bottle and tapped his graphs in a neat pile at the left of the desk. But anaesthesia is not his field. We want to be a big surgeon a big cheese, grow new arms and legs make plastic lungs transplant brains—I don t know what Oh well he s just a kid. He ll grow up He rose. I ll look in on him he said since you want me to By the way coffee with me later in the cafeteria?

I m going there now said Petra. I don t know why surgery

is making me nervous this morning I m out of the habit I guess

Oh come on he said It s a good case You might learn something

No said Petra There is something about this I don t know she repeated I d rather not be there Go on I ll see you after wards

But this is your case isn t it? It s that Japanese girl the one you brought in?

Look Sandy she said I have been asked specifically and un mistakably to get the hell out of that operating room Yes by that drab little boy with the ears She arched her hands over her ears and waggled them So I got Now be a good guy and straighten him out will you?

Gently she put her hands against him and pushed him out of the room then she slipped out of the surgical gown which covered the straight cotton uniform put on her white doctor s jacket and went down to the coffee lounge the mask still dangling from her neck.

The lounge was full and when Petra opened the door she recoiled from the impact of the noise Two hundred office workers of the hospital were there and they were all talking at once rapidly desperately as though they had to crowd into fifteen minutes the entire thoughts of a lifetime Talking laughing too busy even in their happy release to eye the few men who cowered over their morning coffee on the high stools at the counter Petra waited a couple of minutes then found an empty seat and climbed on it Automatically the waitress filled a cup pushed it in front of her waited her eyes elsewhere to give her the chance of asking for something else then scribbled the check and went on Petra fumbled in her pocket for a lipstick and redid her mouth without looking in the mirror which made up the side wall of the room with a wide careless sweep There she thought I have done my duty by the boys She returned the lipstick to her pocket pulled out her pack of cigarettes and then her fingers found the folded paper which she had placed in it four days ago and which she had not even yet answered.

I shall be in town Friday I am counting th days because this time it is you who called me Be good to me when I see you. Thea don t let it be a game to you. It is not a game to me. Five years is a long time but I can t forget that you have been my wife and that you were happy with me. Believe me, we can find a good solution a common ground and if this should fail then I ll come all the way I am ready to give in all the way Thea. You are the stronger of the two of us and perhaps I ve been stubborn too long I need you——

It s now she thought What shall I do about Herb?

Absently she stirred the coffee in which there was neither cream nor sugar over and over again preoccupation drawing a furrow across her brow Herb she thought my dear my very nice Herb why can t I let you meet somebody else and get married and have children as good as earnest and as true as you are? I should let you get married Herb she said to him wordlessly You should get a nice schoolteacher from your home town who will admire the hard working lawyer give him the first place in her life and simply and wholeheartedly make him happy But I m stubborn Herb I can t let go of you I can t let you forget me even if you want to

Coffee black and doughnuts said a voice beside her Well, said Sandtsrom turning on his stool beside her I can t imagine what you were worrying about. He s handling the job all right He s a bit excited because it s his own responsibility but he s quite equal to it Good grief he s got to start solo some time He s only got three months of this you know He d better learn something before he starts in surgery

Oh hell I don t care about him said Petra It s the patient I m concerned about

Sandstrom pursed his lips and nodded his head several times Well he said I guess she ll make it all right Taikkes the second seems to have everyone well in hand. The way Stull lords it over

h on rating oom o d h nk h w h old m boy Pr ttv

a blow

Yes Sandstrom agreed breaking up his doughnut that was a blow He swallowed some coffee and munched on his eyes enormous under the thick glasses That was a blow all right And the boy not even a Catholic after all And all his medical education gone down the drain Well to each his own salvation We are all entitled to that much, aren t we?

She looked at him. Are we Sandy? she asked Sometimes I wonder

So speaks the sinner he said By the way whose billet-doux were you reading when I came in?

She hesitated an instant then My husband s she said

Not again?

Yes she said My fault this time And now I m getting cold feet I m darned if I know what to do about it

Your fault? he said astonished How is that?

I was lonely she said I was depressed and lonely I called him up I thought—— But now I don t know any more and I m beginning to feel horribly uncomfortable about it He was starting to date some girl in Howard

Damned awkward, he said Can t you stop thinking about him period?

I could, she said but—— Look suppose I did and he got married to the local fourth grade teacher—one of them must be *pretty* wide-eyed and eager—then what about me?

Well he said reasonably what about you now? What would that change?

Nothing she said except that there he is in the background *still waiting still adoring and it s a heck of a good feeling for a* woman to have I don t know I might I just possibly might.

And cook his meals mend his socks read the funnies in the local commercial sheet and get the *Sund y Her ld T ib ne* on Monday night by the six o clock bus *Would that do it?*

He s willing to come back to New York, she said give me my head and try it again

He s done it before. Don t do that to him Petra That would be the worst cut of all. Say he added they re paging Taikkes now

In the silence of the now empty room above the roar of the air conditioner the loud-speaker heard at last, was saying in the anonymous voice which was thin and frayed Dr Taikkes Dr Taikkes Dr Hjalmar Taikkes

He s in the building then said Petra Let s go try to find him.

The loud speaker will find him said Sandstrom Tell me when are you going to meet your roommate?

Tonight, said Petra He s stopping at the Savoy Plaza I ll meet him for dinner

Sandstrom pushed his cup to the edge of the counter and the waitress refilled it then Petra s Well he said be good now Remember a false move at this point may be fatal

[illegible] said Petra I don t

[illegible] or I m not my usual

[illegible] ed.

Which one?

That s good he said That s famous Which of the twenty five interns and the twelve residents is not in love with you?

About three she said. Let s see Bell is happily married and I ve let him alone——

Okay he said I m talking about Sturbu about Nick. He looks

[illegible] It

[illegible]

This feeling sorry for people can go too far said Sandstrom And you feel sorry for the funniest people Petra How about feeling sorry for yourself some time?

I do she said Just give me a chance She slipped off the high stool. I ve got to find Taikkes she said She put her hand on his arm You ll check on Nick again won t you?

Sure he said and shall I call your husband for you and tell him it s no soap

No she said I guess I can do that myself

He answered at once as though he had been sitting beside the telephone waiting for her to call His voice was just as she remembered it but breathless tense She knew him so well that she could see his eyes the pupils which dilated a little whenever he got excited

Darling he said I just got out of the shower I was going to call the office——

I thought you would I m still at the hospital Herb and I ll be making up lost time at the office all afternoon I don t think I ll be able to get out early

But you are coming he said We ll have dinner together

Yes we will she said and heard in spite of herself the note of tenderness which crept into her voice Oh hell she thought I m misleading him he s going to sta t hoping Do I want him? She heard him making plans for the evening and then unwilling to let go of her giving her the news of the small Illinois town where she had lived with him for those long years naming names which now were without a face

Darling she said I ve got to tell you——

Immediately his voice stopped and she felt in the dark silence the tension and pain come upon the man to whom she was still bound not in law not by marriage any more but by the unrejectable bonds of the first giving Her own voice broke

Then more tentative with an obvious effort at calm Yes Thea what is it? he said

She did not have the heart to explain Nothing she said We ll talk later

You are not changing your mind

She laughed in spite of herself a high nervous laugh No no she said you d mb bunny I am not

My dear he said reproachfully

Tonight then she said At seven

Then softly because now she felt as though she were with him

in the bare hotel room seeing him bare foot shoulders hunched and cramped having reached the phone in one great leap from the bathroom and because her throat was full of his own anguish.

Good-bye Herb she said softly Too softly And having hung up she went out of the booth slapping the door shut hard as she would have liked to slap herself for being so damn hypocritical—or else so open and bare

9

She had noticed the girl as soon as she had entered the Lounge while she Petra was still talking to Sandstrom She had watched without thinking the manner at once brazen and tentative in which she had stood at the door first looking at the tables then

straightened again the whole body weight—what there was of it that is one hundred one hundred and one or two pounds—swung on one hip with the knee of the left leg turned in a little in the historical presentation of the show girl And Petra taking in the too light-coloured too shaggy haired polo coat tightly and bizarrely belted the young face so pure in its surface and so ravaged in the delicate kneading of the almost childish flesh of the throat and cheek the dark hair which alone with its white side parting was innocent and fresh wondered at her one fleeting moment and dismissed her without di gnosis

But now the girl was beside her waiting for the elevator and their eyes met And the thought until then still inarticulate in Petra s mind broke through to her consciousness A show girl she thought Pregnant and dull enough to think that this is the place to come to solve her problem She s going to ask me where the social worker is and I ll have to lead her there by the hand

The girl started to speak but her words were unexpected Where can I find my husband ? she said Dr Stull

Dr Stull ? said Petra with a jerk of surprise Your husband ?

Yes said the gi l Where is he ?

He s in surgery said Petra He s operating right now He won t be through for another hour

Oh, said the girl Is it that slow ?

Well said Petra yes It is better that way you know
— I didn t
she is a
by th

wrong saleswoman I laying the doctor s wife Hollywood style.

Where can I wait for him?

We have a library said Petra with magazines and things. Would you like to sit there? It ll be a long wait though.

I don t mind said Dido I have nothing to do

Come along then said Petra I am Dr Letrie Your husband is working on one of my patients

I know said the girl You don t look the way I thought.

Petra smiled but let the remark drop She could see the kind of image the child had in her mind the great bony handed massive-shouldered women who made up the female part of the medical profession and who were disappearing now It was no longer necessary to affect the allure of a man to become an M.D Somehow the *caricature remained But it would be hard to translate this into the* girl s language and it did not concern her so she led her in silence.

The library was empty but warm and cozy with its deep armchairs and its bright cretonnes Especially now in contrast with what was happening out-of-doors—great winds and the beginning of another snow storm There said Petra Here are the fiction books the detective stories and the magazines

And those? asked the girl

Those are the medical books said Petra. I don t think you d be interested in them.

I am said the girl She took a few steps raised her hand toward one of the textbooks then let it drop Which would you read, she asked Petra with the directness of a school child if you didn t *know anything at all?*

Is this an act thought Petra or do they really come this way? Aloud she said You d better leave those alone They d give you the horrors Here this is the latest *New Yorker Mademoiselle—Reader s Digest*

You think I am dumb said the girl without a change of expression

Petra laughed. No I m afraid of what your husband would do to me if you started to talk of jaundice at dinner tonight

The girl shrugged. It s not for Dave she said Or only just a little It s mostly for me I am——

Yes? said Petra

So—well—I don t know As though I went on tour in Canada let s say and I got left in a town where I d never been before That s it Or do you know what I mean? People do the same things the trees are the same and the houses are built the same way but it doesn t make sense. The town is different Do you see?

Sit down, said Petra and take off your coat I ll find you something

Lost One word would do Lost And no wonder How on earth

Was sex enough to tie these two? Well she thought I take my hat off to you Dave Still since you did yourself the honour of marrying her You re not beyond hope But absurd as this marriage could be who am I to pass judgment? What about myself and Herb? Was it more honourable to fail in a marriage where everything was meant for success than to attempt happiness when everything seemed set against it?

What is your name? she asked returning with a book in her hands not too thick, not too large for fear of discouraging the girl and with many pictures

Dido said the girl.

Well Dido said Petra, here is a book on children It tells all about growth and disease and diet and everything That would be the best book to start on It s a book for doctors And please call me Petra Everyone calls me that

All right Petra, said the girl She smiled a deliberate flashing show girl smile without warmth Then her face relaxed Your eyes are real blue she said

Suddenly Petra felt very old I m going back to surgery she said I ll tell Dave you re here She put her hand on the girl s shoulder Good bye Dido she said. And good luck.

10

Above the blood rare roast which he was carving with tender skill Taikkes looked at his guest Dr Johnston No he said let us not speak of the boy now I have no intention of spoiling my meal. Later Doctor with a drink in my fist I ll give you the whole works And then we ll go and call on the girl

You re feeling unusually bitter about it said Dr Johnston mildly How long ago was it that he entered the monastery?

Bitter? said Taikkes his knife arrested in mid-air Bitter? That s not the word for it It s not bitterness it s indignation, it s impotent indignation It s fury Don t you have any children?

Three.

Aren t they going into medicine?

They are still pretty young said Dr Johnston helping himself to mustard They are the children of my second marriage you know The boys are still at the electric train stage. Milly is fifteen, though. She thinks she wants to become a psychiatrist like her dad. I m not discouraging her Damned good field for a smart woman if you ask me But I m not going to push any of them into medical school They are not what they used to be when you and I were students Hjalmar Even the best of them.

How do you mean? They learn a hell of a lot more than when I started on my first cadaver Remember bacteriology remember pharmaceutics?

So what? said Johnston We ve got better instruments better microscopes better drugs Heard the story of the tailor and the shoemaker?

Taikkes nodded to the butler Wine Umberto he said then to Johnston Go ahead I won t stop you

Well said Johnston it goes like this Morris who had come

from the old country first was doing pretty well when Abe came over He had one hundred dollars in the bank. So Abe after look ing around a bit comes to him and says Morris I ve got an offer of a store and stock. It s a swell proposition and it has no holes in it The only thing is I need one hundred bucks Go ahead and get started says Morris Today s Sabbath and tomorrow s Sunday but Monday by noon I ll have the money for you So on Monday morning he goes to the bank withdraws his hundred dollars his entire savings and when Abe comes to him he has the money for him

Years go by Morris is doing well but he has eleven children and has not had time to get his nose off the tailor s table So when his daughter wants to get married to the real estate tycoon s son and wants to impress the in laws he goes to Abe and says Abe old friend Esther is marrying Hannibal Vanderplush next week and we got to impress his old man How about letting me have five thousand bucks for a real shindig I ll pay you back at three per cent Abe looks at him and says No Morris no

What says Morris here you are— Oh I forgot to tell you that Abe in the meantime owns the biggest shoe company in America with branches in Buenos Aires Tel Aviv and London So he says Morris no How *no?* says Mo ris Don t you remember when you first came over and it was the depression too and all I had in the world was one hundred dollars I gave them to you to start your business That s all very well says Abe But what have you done for me recently?

I don t get it said Taikkes What have you done for me recently? How do you mean that?

It s like this said Johnston after a pause during which he worked with obvious pleasure on the Yorkshire pudding which sat golden and crisp on his plate All these new drugs have their value they wiped out syphilis in the United States for one thing Granted But before that the e were also remedies of value People got cured and what I meant to say was that what we got out of medical school wl en you and I were youngsters before the advent of the Modern Medicine Man was a quality of enthusiasm a feel ing of father like giving that the modern university with all its

integration of courses its factory like research its graphs and charts and its specialization doesn t come near to fulfilling And the hospitals!

Bah! said Taikkes I well remember the forty bed wards and the smell of vomitus gangrene and urine No Johnston you can t sell that to me He ate in silence then I m not going to talk about my son now he said But I feel that if he had had—well, let us take my present assistant for instance Dave Stull He s a smart boy Brainy If you fail in this business with Garth Doctor I e s going to get my practice my office everything He s already taken over more than halfway He sees my patients for me——

Johnston put down his fork wiped his lips and looked at Taikkes from under the low orbital ridge below which his eyes were so deep-set that they seemed half veiled You ve given up he said

Look said Taikkes Leave me out of this You haven t got too much time to make a diagnosis of Garth and doggone it I m going to get a diagnosis out of you before I let go of you So let s not fog the picture with who I am or why It s taken me the whole four months to get his consent—damn it—to be seen by a psychiatrist and then by a psychiatrist of my choice I can t tell you old boy

Johnston laughed Well I come easier he said This is right down my alley and I am glad to have the chance to prod one of the boys At the formative religious stage that is But tell me this. I ve asked you by letter and you never did answer it There are of course two possibilities one that the boy is really ill mentally confused schizophrenic In which case what? Will the Superior let the boy go for treatment or leave permanently or what?

He gave his word

And the other is suppose as I rather think that the boy is perfectly sane Then what are you going to do?

Fornicate like crazy said Taikkes emphatically I ll never know the sons of my flesh. I m too old to care By the time they d be twenty I d be seventy nine It s too late to pass anything on—

except life itself But somewhere black or white there ll be some woman who won t know how to get rid of it and give birth to my personal eternity I m sorry if you feel it foolish I don t

I didn t say that replied Johnston mildly It sounds rather dreary to me So much left to chance But what I want to warn you about is this Let us assume that the diagnosis is that your boy is perfectly sane in the way we usually understand sanity but that some factor has brought about a deep mal djustment The boy is too imaginative to wish for suicide Tomorrow is still too interesting to him but the world in which he must live must be the one in which what he is has to find approval and not ridicule Well pull him out of there and you may find him some day at the end of a rope in the basement or in the closet Have you thought of that?

What s the difference? said Taikkes brusquely Besides give them credit for this much They don t take would be suicides out there To me one way or the other he is dead anyway

Okay okay said Johnston in the gentle voice which sounded so surprising coming from so massive a frame All right Taikkes I only wanted to warn you. Now he said pushing back the empty coffee cup and snipping the tip of his cigar tell me your story and then I ll tell you what I have been able to find out

I m not good at stories said Taikkes Come let s go into my study

Here he said a moment later picking up a notebook from his desk here s a summary that I wrote when you told me you were coming You have it in outline This gives everything I can think of which is relevant The various emotional moments of his childhood adolescence and youth as I remember them the grades in school (all exceptional as you will notice) bunch of the school magazines of which he was the editor with some of the ghastly stories he used to write all ending in pools of blood and gore like youngsters stories will I guess Here are some letters of his to his grandmother which she had kept and which I found There is one he wrote her when his mother died and you ll find it in there I think. I remember when he wrote it

Did you ask him to?

No it was his idea He was let s see—it was in 1936 I think—he was eleven years old A damn good letter if you ask me. Here, let me read it to you

I ll come to it in time, said Johnston Taikkes go on, get yourself a drink and the paper Leave me to that stuff At what time did you tell his girl we d call on her?

Nine o clock, said Taikkes She is married now But that s unimportant——

Go on said Johnston Let me read. He put on his glasses and spreading his papers on the table, suddenly lifted his head again Don t expect me to tell you anything definite before I see the boy tomorrow he said Much has happened between all of this and last July

Yes said Taikkes darkly The war

Taikkes lit his pipe with great avid puffs and rose again from the table He turned the radio on and turned it off again. Finally he went to the window and stood there watching the blasting wind whirl the snow in harsh upward slants while the traffic slowed down to a crawl on the ice-covered street. *Cold* he thought Even in here I can feel the cold draughts coming through the window joints And I ve got oil heat a roaring fire in the fireplace an electric blanket a belly full of red meat and wine And out there my son eats beans sleeps on a bare floor with a single horsehair blanket in a near freezing temperature with a slat under his head And his flesh—my flesh and Lotte s—scratched and bruised by a hair shirt and a knotted rope And even that sleep is broken every three hours by their insane genuflections

Mad he cried turning toward Johnston I tell you the boy is mad Please believe me and get him out of there There are treatments—insulin electric shock lobotomy My God I tell you the boy had everything and if he d wanted more I would have given him my practice tomorrow

Let me read said Johnston patiently And stop worrying will you? A medical practice is not the ultimate in happiness as you very well know

Yes said Taikkes turning back to the window I know that. But what is?

'The end of a rope Johnston had said True occasionally doc tors committed suicide Mostly barring out and-out insanity these were cases in which an abortion committed in the name of friend ship by an otherwise ethical man had turned out badly Or else incurable disease Or else blackmail in cases of extramarital love or homosexuality These things happened But with Garth?

I ll take care of him he thought If his mind is regressing I ll take care of him I ll feed him with my own hands I ll give up every

fighting death every day on the operating table and I ve let my own flesh wither and rot without a thought My only son What have I done oh, what have I done he said to the blackness outside to be so struck and so eviscerated

Because marriage was out Some people married at fifty nine and became fathers again But from a desire for women or com panionship or care in their declining years Petra deserves better than me and I ll not thrust a decaying body to a decaying maiden I won t buy off a brood sow to be the mother of my sons Besides he thought with renewed fury it isn t sons as sons that I need It s Garth my own work which was well done and my best achieve- ment the son I was proud of who has turned around and denied me for the sake of the Gre t Father Image-With A Beard and thirty lashes of the rope

Give me a drink Umberto he told the butler who was adjust ing the logs in the fireplace Make it stiff I want to feel it going down

Johnston looked up Oper ting tomorrow Doc or? he said

Yes said Taikkes But Stull can handle the case if I can t It s about time he was on his own Drink?

Johnston shook his head Well he said after a moment gather ing the papers into a sheaf and returning them to Taikkes it builds up all right But it s ten after nine Let s go

Any impression so far? asked Taikkes later while the car was driven slowly along the icy streets Anything you care to tell me?

I make no diagnosis before I see the patient, said Johnston

But one thing I can tell you The boy is unusually articulate in his thoughts

So what? asked Taikkes

So he is less likely to be swayed by moods His emotions are recognized and no matter how impetuous he might be he sees himself while he acts Therefore it is less likely that, having made

We ll be out in about forty minutes

Lillian Clark who wasn t Clark any more who wasn t Lillian Taikkes as she should have been but was now Lillian Brindisi, blonder than ever prettier than ever since she was pregnant came to the door in person So they have no servants thought Taikkes with satisfaction If she d married my son they d have Umberto, whether he wanted to go to them or not Umberto knows how to take care of Garth better than any woman She wouldn t have had to be doorman cook and janitor and nursemaid to her husband besides H ll she would have jumped at the chance Any woman would have He didn t give her the chance He didn t give any of us a chance Not even me He didn t care We are nothing to him

He followed Lillian and the psychiatrist into the living room, pleasant enough in its conventional modernism with its drawn Venetian blinds the blend of its soft colours and the expected Van Gogh [illegible]

the table model television set the birch furniture the spinet—with the expert glance of the surgeon matching the cost of his operation to the monthly salary of the patient Four hundred four hundred and fifty A young draughtsman would not make much more than that In time he might hit eight or ten thousand a year Good enough for them Let them rot in it

He forced himself to face the man who was walking to him, hand extended while Lillian having made the introduction was

waiting for the words he had to say He said them and sat down the back of the swinging modernistic chair slapping him across the shoulder blades He got up again and finding a straight chair settled down.

Lillian and Johnston sat down too but Frank what s his-name, Frank Brindisi remained standing Frank looked unhappy Taikkes noted with bitter gloating Frank didn t like the idea at all. To Frank the Garth episode shouldn t have happened to his wife just as he himself felt that it was Frank who shouldn t have happened to Lillian. She should have remained what she was where she was and waited She should have let Garth know that he mattered to her Perhaps it would have made a difference At one time he had loved her

But what is a man s love to a woman if not an incomprehensible language that has no meaning no key no ciphering code except through the translations of things the diamond three-quarter carat or two carats the car a Ford or a Cadillac the rent paid the bills paid the insurance A man loves a woman, in the woman s mind not if he takes her to be his to enter his life to share his image, to endure his years but only in the measure of the price he is willing to pay Was it that Garth loving her had not thought it necessary to pay that the woman had found a higher bidder a man willing to promise—and sign that promise before the judge and before witnesses—that he was going to love cherish and pay her as long as he lived and provide for her after death did them part? And so they d live happily together each doing his job in complete misunderstanding of the other diverging slowly shedding each year their snake s skin until finally they would face each other one day without recognition without even the memory of their young love

It needn t have been that way for Garth, thought Taikkes taking the glass of light wine with distaste the glass the young man had poured and the young woman proffered and placing it beside him on the low table Garth hadn t stopped growing at fifteen like most people Garth was the dreamer the searcher He would have carried his woman along with him he would have engrossed her not only with the children of his body but with the rich flow of

his mind so that in time when she ceased being his woman she could have been his companion different from him bu worthy of him because he would have made her his own Just as I transformed Lotte before she was taken from me just as I made Petra a living human being instead of the inane wife of an inane small-town attorney aware of herself now aware of her senses and of her mind superior to the farce of happy living—as though happiness mattered if only one could be living

Frank was unhappy He was talking to Johnston in short, unfinished phrases He was saying that he didn t understand what this was all about that he had not known that a psychiatrist was going to question his wife that he thought it was information they had wanted that he wasn t going to have anyone prying into Lillian s girlhood that she was his wife now and if they had any questions to ask they should ask them of him

But that s not it Johnston was saying in that lazy voice of his, soft and uncaring while all the time he hung on to his idea knowing he d get his way There s nothing we want to know about Mrs Brindisi We aren t doing a Kinsey report I assure you. I have a teen age daughter of my own you know

He let that drift stretched his legs before him and lit a cigarette High-school love affairs are pretty much the same the world over he said easily It looks real enough while the play is on but what it amounts to usually is a kind of dress rehearsal a tryout for the kids for the real life situations

Words thought Taikkes angrily words strung together a waste of time the rubbing of the infant s gums with a pacifier Don t bother with him It s not his business Throw him out, tell him to go away

He looked up at Frank Whatever could be said about him, certainly he could not be thought of as being articulate nor bright, nor really handsome nor anything at all that might by any stretch of the imagination make him a decent substitute for Garth Except this that he was the husband Tall even taller than Garth stupidly tall like the overfed son of immigrants with dark hair curly hair that probably matted his chest, good teeth straight and white—Lillian probably sent him to the dentist every six months—grey

eyes thickly lashed a big mouth with wide muscular lips—he was

had gained something And what she had gained was good.

She was smiling now looking up at her husband with an indul gent womanly smile pulling him down beside her on the love seat on which she was sitting with torso thrown back and knees parted because her pregnancy was advanced and her back beginning to ache pulling him down beside her so as to get him down to her level and once there force him to agree with her to listen to the psychiatrist. She was hiding her eagerness under half-closed eyes her well groomed hand lying lightly on her husband s shoulder her well bred smile holding back the bold or furtive questions that she herself wanted to ask. Was he in the monastery because of her Had he given up because of her? Had he the surgeon, the thinker thrown away his share of the world because she hadn t waited for him because she had married before he had returned to the States?

Ha said Taikkes aloud and for moment there was a tangible silence while their eyes returned to the polite lies before their voices and their thoughts could Taikkes sensing their embarrassment smiled contemptuously and returned to his thoughts She did not leave him it was he who had dropped he shortly after he got to Korea He grew away from her she could not follow him she was too dull too boring too limited He poor boy had to enter that abyss alone But whether he wrote he or not she should have waited for him in order not to demean herself not to appear so cheap if not from a sense of consideration for him But she had found Frank and Frank had been willing

'Well Frank was saying if it s just personality traits you re after——

They had been talking arguing quietly at least Johnston and the girl were quiet and having been told that she did not mind that there was nothing to be emb rrassed about that all that was wanted was a portrait of the man she had been engaged to and nothing else F ank had subsided as he would subside in every

difference they would ever have all their lives long. He walked away resentment still graven on his dark Italian face. Johnston had begun to write scribbling his little notes in the small no e-book.

Taikkes his body abandoned and heavy watched them sitting together now the woman and the doctor as if from a great distance as he had at times attended autopsies where the things on the table were dissected and weighed one item at a time and noted in methodical little signs on the protocol sheets brain so many grammes thyroid so many grammes such and such texture and shape kidneys so many grammes friable or firm liver nodular or smooth shrunk or necrotic so many grammes adrenals readily detached the capsule patchy or haemorrhagic the heart large dilated hypertrophied—his son

The table was bare between Johnston and the woman but stretched between them more poignant than a blank and appeased cadaver quietly acquiescent forever remote were not the blood less display of organs of man but Garth s mind and soul Garth s young love Garth s adolescence and early manhood and his—Taikkes —only meaning of life

He felt oppressed He wanted to get up to leave this room to stuff his ears against the quiet questions and the eager answers The woman damn her was enjoying herself She was talking rapidly improvising when her memory failed her seeking meanings where none was wanted tossing about the cheap jargon of the pseudo-psychologists finding a pattern a la Hitchcock in the moods and changes of her sweetheart, diagnosing freely and importantly helping the psychiatrist to make up his mind But Johnston let her talk prodding her only this way and that when she was digressing when inevitably it was herself she was speaking of when the image of Garth which she had seen but which was not the true one was beginning to blur and to disappear from her mind.

There was nowhere to go He could not leave the room without causing a stir without discourtesy to the psychiatrist without losing somehow the power of check he had on the divagations of the young woman There was no other place to go except into the other room where the man the husband was sitting alone If

Taikkes were to go there and sit with him, the ghost would rise then between them in silence and in guilt

He was a good dancer Lillian was saying nothing spectacu lar but good. But it was the music he liked the jive the bebop I didn t understand it at first My forte you know always has been classical music—the three B s It excites me even though I m not much of a player

He liked to dance repeated Johnston

We would go to all sorts of outlandish places Sometimes he wouldn t even want to dance at all We d sit in a corner and he drank in the music or just let it float him It was very strange and it worried me a little even then because when I hear a good band I like to do something about it I respond but with him it was like dope He d sit there as though he were in a trance way on into the night

When Garth was twenty-one Taikkes had given a dance for him on his birthday during the summer vacation Ostensibly the dance was in honour of the two sisters of his roommate who d come to visit him from New Haven but it was for Garth of course that he d bothered at all Garth had worried about it for days that things wouldn t go right that the crowd would not have a good time that the band would be too loud for the size of the hotel [illegible]

that he had really noticed her quiet slender almost unfashionable in the very simple d ess that she had worn without jewels real or false the gardenia Garth had sent her almost lost in the foamy silver blondeness of her hair Taikkes glancing in the ballroom from time to time with some of the youngsters parents h d thought how sweet she looked and had wished for one moment that the woman Garth would take to him would be this clear-eyed youngster with the straight spine the graceful long neck the shy reticent smile. It seemed like yesterday and it had been nine years ago And here was Lillian buoyantly burstingly pregnant dissect ing the past

He said he liked books but I seldom saw him reading I d give him books for Christmas and for—well you know anniversaries but while he thanked me he never mentioned them again I doubt that he ever read them and I chose them so carefully *The Prophet* I remember giving him that and when I found the book once in his room why it had never been opened and I think it s just beautiful And he never seemed to have read anything anybody else would read

No he didn t write He didn t care to He said that would interrupt his thoughts—to write them down I mean I guess he had nothing really new to say

No he wasn t aggressive He d come along anywhere I wanted to go So long as I was there it was all right And he didn t talk a lot most of the time but he didn t like anyone else to talk either so it was often awkward when we were with people He d say nothing and keep me beside him expecting me to say nothing also and it was as though we were not there as though we were listening in from another planet we the invisible people Do I make myself clear?

No he wasn t really popular There was an aura about him as though he would be interesting if he chose but he didn t choose and it froze people and——

Taikkes stirred Nonsense he said violently He was constantly invited everywhere During the holidays——

Johnston without looking up from his notes shook his head. Please he said I need this picture

Nonplussed for only a moment Lillian went on choosing with almost malicious care Taikkes felt the incidents that would create the impression that Garth was crazy underlining the awkward gestures of diffident youth emphasizing not the thoughtful Garth, but the daydreamer not the carefree Garth but the reckless not the original mind but whatever might seem odd disorganized, erratic

But that s what I wanted he thought Some proof that the boy is erratic is irresponsible I want to get him out of there and the girl is helping, she is doing what she can

But not in the right way Not from her He isn t crazy he is lost

Don t you—can t you understand his lids tight over the burning eyes the boy is lost! The world has confused him, the war has confused him We ve cheated him of the world we promise our youth. We taught him that work and honesty and cleanliness and faith would be rewarded We taught him I taught him that the end of a scientist of a man was to seek goodness and kindness and health and then he is plucked out of a quiet home and his fancy school and thrown among barbarians kept in the filth of the char nel house with the stench of death in his nostrils We told him the world was fair and then we tied him to a picket and raped the world before his eyes He and all the others!

He heard Frank s footsteps in the hall He rose and went to the door Frank had been out to get the newspaper He stopped and looked at Taikkes His eyes were hurt

Aren t they through yet? he said What the hell are they talking about now?

Nothing said Taikkes Routine questions Did they go to the movies did he like books did he go out of his way to make people like or dislike him Junk I could have told him that

The man hesitated one burning question on his lips—the ques tion he could not ask Remotely Taikkes felt sorry for him but w th a detached and unaffecting kind of sorrow No Garth and Lillian had not slept together What was good enough for Frank had not been good enough for Garth B t F nk was happy with her The child growing in his wife s vomb w s his own He knew Lillian well enough to know that Frank was strong he had survived the war He d come back a whole man

Frank he said you were in the army weren t you?

The dark face relaxed Yeah he said. I was Four years

Four

I wa

He lean

have no idea You hate them so you can t eat you can t sleep any more You wake up in the morning and you wish you h d died

— e Especially when

That s when you

it—cripes there s

nothing like it Nothing matters any more Life money family things you buy women—that s nothing Like you were God and the more they come at you the better it gets Like you were God and nothing could touch you

Did you ever think of going back into the army? asked Taikkes

guess My right kidney was shot up

Together they re-entered the room Lillian glanced at them in differently and stretched her massive torso a little then turned again toward Johnston Her voice was low rapid and sweat beaded the round childlike forehead

There was one that kept returning since childhood Whenever he had a cold or was ill or was worried He d dream he was in an immensely long corridor or a tunnel—dark, without issue He felt very small and afraid And way out miles away from him there d be somebody staring at him somebody who saw him but did not help and stared and stared until he woke up

Did he know that person? asked Johnston Was it always the same one?

Yes it was said Lillian It was She looked up at Taikkes and then in the same unemotional voice It was his father she said

Taikkes took the glass of wine standing untouched on the table beside him. He sought Frank s eye wordlessly raised the glass a little and then drank.

11

THE MONASTERY of the Oblates of St Bede is situated seventy-eight miles from New York City seventy-eight miles of flat lands lying dead under the grey February sky Here and there a colourless silo or a rain soaked farm building breaks the flatness of the horizon Dr Taikkes car driven skilfully over the icy roads crossed the suburban towns all alike in the incomparable bleakness of their right angled treeless streets and drugstore corners and followed

Is this possible?

What? asked Taikkes

"All of this said Johnston This blankness this solitude It is as if the whole countryside had been flattened by a steam roller I'd lose my mind if I had to live in one of these suburbs

I like it said Taikkes dully

Johnston turned to him his inquisitive face You do

Taikkes did not answer

Why do you like it? said Johnston in a louder voice

Oh said Taikkes yes I m sorry I was wondering whether they d let me see my son Well yes I like it. I always have The feeling that it stretches you know From one end of Ame ica to the other That one could see from ocean to ocean if one s eyesight were strong enough

Gives me the willies said Johnston But then so do the mountains or even the sea to people who are not accustomed to them M tter of habit of course

Taikkes nodded absently

Have you been able to see Garth? asked Johnston. Since he entered the monastery?

Verboten said Taikkes He turned to Johnston 'They live in silence he said Poverty Obedience Chastity And silence.

Well said Johnston uncertainly and then remained speechless because indeed there was nothing to say Yet Taikkes face the harsh commanding face of the man accustomed to give orders and to be obeyed was so disordered and so undone that he mad another effort This assistant of yours he said this young man you spoke of this morning what is he like?

Taikkes turned to him with an ironical half smile Trying to divert my paternal love into new channels Doctor? he said.

No said Johnston Just trying to make conversation that s all.

Taikkes sighed You re right, he said. I am brooding But that s normal isn t it? I d be a brute if I didn t, but where does it get you? Essentially man is not static We are meant to create and to destroy There is the actual physical destruction of the mother s body by the embryo and the spiritual destruction of the parent by the rejection of the child There must be a balance But what is Garth creating out of the destruction of me? What will he leave behind him in commemoration of us his parents?

I am not versed in religious lore said Johnston but they speak of grace—— His voice trailed off

You sound very convincing said Taikkes Thanks for the try anyhow At least you know if the fool had chosen some workin order—with the hospitals or with schools There he would still act still put to some profit indirectly but valuably his intelligence and his training Suppose he d gone into some Protestant mission for instance Go clean the pubic lice off the pariahs in India disin fect their streams give food to their children—well it would still make some sort of sense That fellow Schweitzer is doing that sort of thing in Africa and I take off my hat to him He still acts like a man But contemplation! Contemplation! Whatever came over him? I tell you the boy was brilliant But you were asking me about Stull my assistant I don t know what to tell you about him I don t even think about the man. He s all right

A good surgeon?

A damn good surgeon Temperamental as hell Not at all like Garth It s funny In a way Stull acts more like me than my own son Than my son used to I mean I don t know whether he is aping me or what

You probably selected him because of some affinity between you two said Johnston

Hell I didn t select him He was my resident when Garth was in the army He was good I really did my best for the boy hoping in a way that somebody would do as much for Garth And I en joyed him So avid to learn so ambitious so thorough So hell bent on trying out new techniques always reading the surgical journals That boy is a library in himself He has given me a couple of pointers You know after a while you are inclined to stay by the old methods and leave certain things alone But it s impossible with Stull He s really crazy about surgery He will make his mark there s no doubt about it

But you know Taikkes added after a pause since Garth did that fool thing and threw everything overboard I ve lost interest in Stull I took him on as ssistant in my office and everything but I don t care for him any more I resent him I don t know how to explain it but I can t help looking upon him as a thief

That s natural, said Johnston After all the office was meant for your son

I suppose said Taikkes I m not critical of him I m not harsh when he misman ges something or when there are complaints about him at the hospital He s not at all popular with the residents or the nurses but I have just lost interest Sometimes I wonder if I am not waiting for an opportunity to give him the boot

And then what?

That s just it said Taikkes Then what?

You d find his wife amusing he added after a moment Dave s wife A cheap little bitch he picked up in a night club some place but cute The last woman I thought he d fall for Such a contrast She was a dancer at the Blitz and he started seeing something of her and by the time I was concerned enough about it to warn him why hell he told me they were engaged I tried to break it up b t I couldn t.

He sounds pretty naive said Johnston not caring

He is Terribly I tell you there s not one thing in common between the two of them They might be speaking different languages for all they understand each other He still does not know what he has married

Come now said Johnston There is one thing in common surely

Bah said Taikkes that type of woman is usually frigid. They couldn t lead that kind of life wear that night-club stuff and stru around the way they do if they suspected what sex was all about They are cold from the word go But they are willing I like having Dido around. The way she talks is straight out of vaudeville. You d die laughing if you heard her

I feel sorry for the boy said Johnston

That s his business said Taikkes lightly No one really need be that dense about women

You d better stop talking about women said Johnston. We are entering the grounds I think

Right said Taikkes Take a look around, will you? Great guns!

Johnston did not reply The building large and squat was emerging from behind a curtain of bare trees on the left side of the road above the river It was built of yellow sandstone which did not even have the grace of harmony with the landscape as solid in design as a modern hospital with wide numerous windows and, except for the cross above the chapel did not in the least resemble Johnston s idea of a monastery There was no one around. When Taikkes got out of the car on to the gravelled path he stood uncertainly at the door

I don t know what to tell you to do Miller he said at last to the driver You might find a drugstore around or a restaurant in the nearest village Get yourself some coffee and then come back. I don t know how long we ll be here

The man touched his cap Very well sir he said and got back into his seat Johnston detected a look of pity in the faded blue eyes

He also felt the weight of discouragement on his shoulders as he

followed Taikkes to the entrance and stood beside him waiting for the answer to the bell He had come at Taikkes invitation with a good deal of interest in the case because it seemed to him an inter esting opportunity of studying the state of mind of the novice the intelligent novice the convert. But he had counted on doing it alone And used though he was to the atmosphere of tragedy

resign tion to the inevitable he was seeking in his mind for the words that might comfort the old doctor and he found none

An old friar bald and lame opened the door bowed and directed them to a reception room Taikkes and Johnston entered uneasily their feet noisy on the b e stone floor and looked around them The room was bright and cold There was a table in the centre with a collection of religious magazines straight back chairs around

He went to the window and stood there looking determinedly over the grounds as though the sight of the room itself was more than he could bear Johnston sat down opened a ma_azine and began to read

After a long time so long that Johnston began to wonder if they had not been forgotten the door opened and a monk middle aged and tall came in

I am Father Thomas he said. I am sorry to have kept you waiting gentlemen

I have come with Dr Johnston said Taikkes and wonder if I shall be able to see my son

Yes said the Superior We shall send for him

I wonder thought Taikkes what he means by we ? He makes all the decisions presumably Or does he mean God and he?

There is no reason to refuse you this slight consol tion the Superior continued. I would like you to know that we understand the magnitude of the sacrifice you are called upon to make and that we congratulate you Dr Taikkes

Taikkes did not answer

There is something I must add though said the Superior without a change of expression When I spoke to your son, he expressed sorrow that this interview was to take place and asked me to do what I could to avoid it.

That s all right said Taikkes I had expected that. But his eyes flickered while he talked and Johnston felt that he had received a telling blow

Uninterrupted concentration and silence are desirable continued Father Thomas without the interfering factor of outside events This is rigorous but charitable A harsh test of this nature is necessary to determine the validity and the strength of the call. If this cannot be withstood the novice returns to the world without regrets If it can it speaks strongly in favour of his sincerity We make it as hard as we can for the novices You understand why

Very sensible agreed Johnston

I am glad you think so You will then understand why he asked me to try again to dissuade you when you came here this morning

No said Taikkes

Very well said the Superior You will see him presently

Taikkes face had a brief contraction But if he refuses——? he said

He will not refuse said the Superior

Taikkes took a deep breath and looked at the man before him with the look of a murderer But I am the father he said in a strangled voice

The Superior bowed He then turned to Dr Johnston Your interview with Dr Taikkes son will be attended by his confessor he said That is his wish not ours

I wasn t aware of that said Johnston He smiled That will make it tougher for me But it s all right I ll manage And please be reassured I ll try to make the young man speak but I ll not try to disturb him I am here to study the case not to bring about a change of heart

Judas muttered Taikkes

Thank you said Father Thomas and left the room

Almost immediately afterwards he returned followed by two men Dr Taikkes Dr Johnston he said Father John of the Cross Brother Aloysius

A cry of anger rose to Taikkes throat which he choked down with pain

Garth stood before him his skull shaven as though for a craniotomy his eyes downcast his feet bare in leather sandals The brown cassock fell about his lean tall body in the same flowing grace which he had given to the expensive lounging robes he wore at home and the impression instinctive and overwhelming given to Taikkes was that his son was ill desperately ill ill beyond repair The room swam before his eyes and brutally ashamed of his cry he turned away toward the window and remained there a moment motionless The others remained silent also from compassion for him perhaps or also from shame Then the Superior spoke

Please greet your f ther Brother Aloysius he said and with a slight bow he left the room

Taikkes turned to his son forcing himself to look at him. Well he said after a moment Garth have you nothing to say to me?

The young man raised his eyes to him the same large speaking blue eyes that were young now and troubled and begging I am sorry he said I am so terribly sorry

I should hope so said Taikkes in a voice Johnston had not heard before a voice that was veiled and cracking I should hope you d be sorry Garth what is this wretched disguise you are wearing? What are they doing to you and how can you let them?

I have to said the boy Please believe me If I didn t have to I could not do this to you

You don t know what you re doing said the father He raised a tentative hand as if to stroke the boy s cheek but let his arm fall You re thin you re undernourished You look like a child in school Garth——

The boy stood mutely before him.

Garth he repeated Garth Garth! He shook his head in anger his teeth clenched Then once again Garth have you nothing to say to me?

What can I say? said Garth. I ve explained many times befor I tried to explain——

Taikkes took a few unsteady steps through the room. Look Garth he said at last, placing with a heavy gesture his two hands on his son s shoulders and looking at him from equal height, eye against eye both of them immovable Look Garth, look at your father Your real father the father of your flesh. If you have a Father in heaven He looks upon me in pity Yes son, in pity See what you are doing to me I have nothing now All is gone. Life, whatever life is left to me is nothing to me I m sixty years old and all I have done has been done for good. I ve not worked for myself, Garth but for the good of others and for you. If I have sinned, I have sinned in anger or in passion. I have not sinned against God as you know Him And I have made a path for my work to continue Through you And what do you do to my work but tramp on it and spit on it and destroy it

His son broke away and turned violently aside No he said. I am not destroying it No I am not doing that Father but you sought one way and I have found another

And what is your way? said Taikkes his voice rising What is the way you have chosen to return the gifts that have been made to you not by me but by the works of nature? You withdraw into a poorhouse you castrate yourself you destroy your mind and your talents——

Please Dad said Garth. This hurts

What do you think it s doing to me? said Taikkes You reject me Very well I don t care I am not the first one to whom this has happened but must you kill every hope? Must you tear out my heart like this? Is it in the Scriptures that man must destroy his seed and scatter it in the desert? Are you following the laws of God?

You don t understand, said Garth. Christ said to follow Him, to give up everything and follow Him.

Did Christ say at what price? said Taikkes his neck swollen

and red from tension Did he say at the price of life itself? Did he not resurrect the dead and return Lazarus to life? Didn t God send an angel to stay the hand of Abraham at the sacrificial stone of Isaac? Do you feel it necessary to strike me like this Is this God s wish? Is that the kind of God you adore?

The friar rose and came to Taikkes Doctor Taikkes he said this is a house of prayer Please try to share the gift God made to your son

Taikkes turned to the friar as though he *meant to strike him* I am not asking for gifts he said I only want to claim my own. He turned back to his son Garth. Are you coming with me?

Garth raised his head No I am not

Am I not your father still? cried Taikkes All right all right I ll go away I ll go away I have nothing more to say to you I too shall pray I shall pray that some day you will understand the hurt you ve done to me your father and I ll pray—I ll pray Garth but not in your way

His voice high pitched and raucous broke suddenly He fell heavily into a chair his breast heaving still trying to speak above the spasms that shook him. I ll pray to be damned Garth that I will not have to be with the son—ah—ah—with the son who despised——

The monk who had left the room returned with a cordial John ston took it from him and brought it to Taikkes lips But Taikkes

12

LEFT ALONE in the monastery parlour Dr Johnston felt an involuntary shudder of revulsion Garth and his confessor had gone out of the room whether to follow Dr Taikkes or to spend some time in prayer he did not know The massive chill of the room fell like a cloak around his shoulders His feet felt frozen to the floor and his fingers were swollen and stiff He wished for a warmer coat. He wished for a room where a fire would be burning where a radiator could be turned on He wished for people who could be reached and moved and felt futile among these monks enclosed in a system of ideas which was foreign to him He wished profoundly that he had not come He wondered whether the crisis he had witnessed would be sufficient pretext to leave But his natural curiosity which had turned him to the research work of psychiatry won over his despondent mood and he resolved to make his trip profitable if not to the Taikkes father and son at least to himself Having decided this he recognized in himself an intense dislike for his task.

He heard the sound of steps outside the parlour and braced himself for the ordeal But instead of Garth it was the porter who appeared and without a word, beckoned him to follow Silently they passed through a long corridor into which several doors opened. He slowed his step To the right was an empty hall lined with huge stone vats sealed into the ground a laundry probably then a carpenter shop where two young monks red faced and sweating were sawing planks of wood with a handsaw Several smaller
r

[illegible] by several bustling friars A warm aroma of preserves came to his nostrils He wondered at the making of

jams at this season of the year but, since his guide seemed bound by the oath of silence the question in his mind remained without answer

At last they arrived in a large refectory The room was equally cold equally large stone
narrow tables The port
him to sit down and w
he re-entered bringing with him to Johnston s surprise a tray with a collation which gave the psychiatrist the first moment of relief since the time he had come into the monastery There was a slab of white cheese two smoked fish a large piece of crusty bread evidently homemade and still warm a dish of purplish jam and a mug of tea. Curiously he tasted the jam and recognized the aroma he had noticed when passing the kitchen It was dried prune jam and it had been burned The tea was strong and bitter but he drank and ate gratef lly the monk standing at his side his eyes downcast his face impassive

I wonder if he is praying thought Johnston or whether he is forbidden to yield to the human need of looking into anyone s face It would afford him little consolation around here though prisoners have been known to escape insanity by observing mice and spiders Lord how can they stand a lifetime of this What vision is present behind the curtain of these men s lids? And if the vision is denied then what abyss and what blackness!

He stood up his meal finished I should like to see Garth Taikkes he said His voice shaking the inert dampness of the refectory sounded like an erupting volcano and shocked him. He
to see
Yo k

The porter jarred perhaps by such a long speech was already leaving the room Johnston took a few steps after him and entered another parlour smaller than the first but equally cold. He sat down again and lit a cigarette cupping his hand over the shaft as for warmth The smoke which filled his lungs and nostrils felt good and he exhaled it slowly blowing several short puffs which floated away in rings I am getting childish he thought. This house has

already affected me And I haven t been here more than one hour! But of course the easiest of all changes is the regression of the adult to the feelings of childhood. That is why the oath of obedience serves so well the purpose of the convent and of the monastery Even in disobedience the emphasis is shifted the sin is not the specific action any more but is transformed into rebellion against authority Which is easier to deal with. Ah here comes my patient accompanied by his duenna.

Father John of the Cross sat down at one extremity of the table, far enough from Johnston to be able to abstract himself from the examination but close enough to hear if he cared to Johnston noted with disapproval that if any emotion had touched the younger man his face now was extraordinarily calm and placid as he crossed the room He sat down beside Johnston crossed his hands in his lap and waited.

This said Johnston lightly is not exactly the equivalent of the office couch.

No said the young man it isn t.

Are you doing this willingly?

I am doing it willingly since it is my Superior s wish.

It is your father s wish, said Johnston Are you happy to comply with the desire of your father?

It is not the reason I am here said Garth I hope that he may find some consolation in it

Are you concerned about him? asked Johnston Or is his well being a matter of indifference to you?

I am praying for him

I don t mean that Garth, what did you feel when you saw your father?

Garth did not answer Johnston could not see his eyes but there was a quality of firmness about his silence that was different from the hesitant confused silence or from the defiant mutism of his usual patients He had the calmness of stone It was aloof and cold It was contemptuous

Do you care at all what becomes of your father whether he lives or dies?

Silence again closed in around the question. Once more the chill

ness of the air invaded Johnston s mind. He glanced at Father John of the Cross who met his eye with a questioning look.

You have agreed to answer my questions said Johnston after a long moment

I thought your questions were those of a specialist questioning a possible patient I find they are meant to shock an imbecile

You will leave to me the choice of a method said Johnston drily If they seem absurd to you remember St Thomas

The absurd the unlikely is often the most reasonable said Garth. *Credo q ua abs rdum est*

Because it is absurd ? asked Johnston

Quia said Garth Because

Johnston refrained from expressing satisfaction They were entering the new room whose door he h d not hoped to pass so soon Cautiously but side by side No it would be better to let Garth precede him and show him around Would you care to enlarge ? he asked This type of thinking is not familiar to me

It is logical said Garth Since nothing makes sense then the explanation of the phenomenon of life must be sought on a different level of thinking not subject to the laws of human common sense This is one of the definitions of faith

Nothing makes sense repeated Johnston What is it that does not make sense to you

Does death make sense ? said Garth Is total death your sort of death a reason ble conclusion of the life of the spirit ?

My sort of death as you call it said Johnston may have its
—

was

[illegible] asked Johnston in an even tone.

No said Garth not at all. Nor do I wish to argue

The door one moment open was shut again Shut by his own hands by his awkwardness Johnston changed his appro ch. You have had training in psychiatry ? he asked

Six weeks only said Garth under Murphy at John Hopkins I did specialize in neurosurgery though.

'The two fields have something in common said Johns on. What I am driving at is this You are acquainted with the technique of personality evaluation You remember having practised it and not only in the psycho wards You know what sort of picture I am trying to define in my mind don t you?

Yes said Garth.

It can be done by the question and answer method yes and no That s the slow way reserved for the uncooperative the naive and the imbeciles It can be done by the slow release of the stream of the unconscious That s not for us either We could save a good deal of time and I regret to say I am short of time right now if you would spare me all the fumbling and give me your own picture of yourself I think that would be the most helpful I could then match it with the picture got elsewhere and see whether they fit

He waited for Garth to express some curiosity about the elsewhere, but Garth s grey eyes did not flicker Courteous attentive and aloof

The range-finder system?

A short cut said Johnston I am being frank with you. It s crude but it s the best I can attempt under the circumstances.

He rubbed his fingers together and blew on them to limber his writing hand The circumstances were rugged But Garth seemed unaware of them

Where shall I start? he asked At my first memory?

That ll do said Johnston

Garth put his elbows on his knees caught one hand in the other The lines of on h tightened a l Johnston wh

the young man now became aware that until then he had been addressing an automaton the animated armour with which his patients so often covered their wounds The good ones that is those worth saving those it took a long time to probe those who suffered not from wounded pride not from business failures nor from unrequited love nor from the fear of death but from what he himself had at one time endured and then covered up and

dismissed unsatiated and unconsoled the curse of the spirit the tormenting need of the infinite the desire of the absolute

The path that led to the lake had a wall on one side The wall was of stone large rectangular unevenly hewn and set in cement If you rubbed the leaves of the lilac bush against one of the stones the middle stone nose level and projecting it made a long narrow spot first green and then brown The stone had to be rubbed otherwise you hadn t been there The lake was at the end of the path It had a wall a smooth one level with your head It was too high for you to see the lake You had to walk beside the wall Sometimes Mommy would lift you upon the wall and you would walk very carefully along your hand in Mommy s Then you could look down into the lake and see the minnows and the pebbles under the water That was every afternoon and the afternoons were good Then once there had been the girl Ida She was as big as Mommy but she wasn t old. Ida had picked you up and sat you on her shoulder He is so little she had said, he doesn t weigh anything at all And he had ridden like that above Mommy above everybody And he was the tallest of all Ida was good

I remember a young woman carrying me on her shoulder on a walk beside the lake

There was the taste of porridge that he had to eat when he was ill. The awful blandness and dullness the cotton thickness of the porridge the gagginess of that uneatable unswallowable porridge that had to be pushed down There was the awful injustice of that ignoble porridge that mixed with the taste of sickness in his mouth Day after sick day it had to be endured And Mommy was implacable the enemy with the spoon

I remember being forced to eat more than I wanted having been ill

The e was the deep brown leather armchair from Daddy s own room It was broken and the leather was cracked It wasn t in Daddy s room any more It was in a dark corner of the little room whe e the trunks were and the smell of the camphor balls and the shoe trees The brown leather armchair was Good Daddy but nobody knew it. The leather was ripped and the gold nails came

off When Daddy had been bad you pulled off the gold nails You could put them back in most of the time but sometimes they wouldn t stay in. And Daddy wouldn t have all his sharp pointed nails that s all The leg in front was broken and you could sway it from side to side like a rocker as though somebody rocked you to sleep That s the place you went to when you were scolded and hid your face into and could cry Because it was cool to the cheek and quiet and dark.

I remember a broken armchair in an attic where I hid when I was scolded.

There had been the white lamb Blanket. Blanket was mounted on four wheels and had a lead around its neck. Blanket could be pulled all the way down to the end of the block when you went out and then when you crossed the street, Miss Loo would squoosh her massive figure to the ground and pick up Blanket and carry him to the other side of the street Blanket did not like Miss Loo and Miss Loo did not like Blanket One day Miss Loo had told him to go on pulling Blanket down the kerb there was no need to pick him up and you had said Blanket will fall and get dirty and Miss Loo had made him pull Blanket down the kerb anyway saying he wouldn t fall So you did and Blanket had fallen and got dirty And you had been right and Miss Loo wrong And Blanket had been given away one day to the son of the black cook. What had Blanket felt when he went into the home of the black cook, he, the white lamb?

I remember a toy lamb given away to a Negro child.

There had been the trip to Italy with Mommy and Dad when Dad was going to talk to the Italian doctors They understood Daddy though they didn t understand you or Mommy And you were in Rome, in the Giardino Pincio there was the man with the balloons there were the donkeys you could ride and there was the fountain You were playing beside the fountain with your sailboat. You ran into the little girl with dark long hair and a quiet face And you had said Excuse me to her in English. She answered, *Prego* in Italian And the way she had said *Prego* was so beautiful, it was so gentle it was so clear it had rung in your ears long long afterwards You could still close your eyes and see the little girl?

face swallowed up by her curls you could see her standing there in the gravelled path around the fountain and hear her grave her sweet Italian voice saying *Prego*

I remember a young girl in Italy whom I pushed involuntarily and who answered very nicely to my apology

Prego I pray

Mother had died in Rome

It wasn t during that trip It was many years later You were in school that time They called you to the principal s office The principal s wife was there You went home with her When you got there she told you And all you could think of was you were not expected to make a fuss about it She didn t want a fuss She didn t put it that way but that s what she thought They didn t want a fuss It would be bad form for you to make a fuss So you had waited pushing the thought way down inside you hard, hard until they d let you alone. But they wouldn t let you alone They wanted you to stay there that day with that terrible woman with *the long teeth and the horrible grimacing tender smile* You let her babble you answered politely when she expected you to you did what she wanted And the more you waited for the afternoon to end so you could go b ck to school to your own room in school the more they watched you and your head ached until even your teeth ached and your throat and when dinner time came you had to sit at their table but your mouth was cl mped shut by that time and you couldn t open it. And when you finally opened it, you threw up right on the dinner table You were already grown up You were eleven years old

I remember my mother s death And the unpleasant woman who told me she had died

Johnston raised his eyes The young man was speaking in brief sentences with long intervals in between quietly without emotion. A woman carrying him on her shoulder when he was little beside a lake A broken armchair in a dark place where he hid. A toy given away to a coloured child Another child speaking to him in a foreign language His mother s death——

What did your mother die of?

Ca of the uterus

His mother s death from a disease perhaps dreadfully linked in the boy s mind with the act of love or with the act of birth. Lillian had spoken of a recurrent dream in which his father at one end of an infinite tunnel—the birth symbol of course—stared at him with an accusing eye. The Oedipus rivalry both in desire for the love-object and in anguished sharing of the guilt. In anguished sharing and repudiation. I did not kill screamed the child inside his dream, fighting the fog of the prepuberty sex knowledge, tormented by the guilt of his first experiments and made now to face the inacceptable loss She did not die because of the things I have done Or was she struck in the womb because of me?

His father had been a doctor The doctor had not saved her The man his mother loved loved perhaps more than she loved him, had let her die

Garth s face was stiffly controlled but the flesh of the lower orbit was swelling with the dark flux of blood.

Did you love your mother?

Yes

Dr Taikkes said Johnston, we are not getting any place.

I agree with you

Garth s father had he been the patient would have stamped out of the room or struck the table or vehemently sworn out an oath. No matter what his reaction it would be easier to handle Anything would be easier to handle than this courteous and ungraspable young man

You say you loved your mother said Johnston She died when you were at an age when the loss of a parent can be a somatic disaster And yet your next sentence concerns the person who told you about it. A woman you did not like Surely one of these facts is more impotrant than the other Which?

You are attempting to make me angry said Garth. I am no longer capable of anger

Congratulations said Johnston bitterly I wish I could say as much

I am trying to be honest said Garth I am not interpreting I give you the facts and you will interpret them To answer your question—— he hesitated well it was just as painful not being

able to suffer alone as to suffer at all At first I ll draw you a parallel My father broke away from me broke away violently That is painful It is equally painful just now to be speaking of it to have had that scene witnessed Is that what you want?

Again that sharp recognition of the already felt the heart un claimed unmourned still beating and yet buried

Very good said Johnston If you ever return to the world Doctor and consider psychiatry as a specialty I should be glad to show you around

A flush of blood rose to Garth s face which Johnston duly noted.

I don t think this is likely to happen he said I do not share your interest in the importance of the emotions of childhood. What counts I think is not the unconscious nebulae but the conscious efforts of the adult to reach the full spiritual stature No matter what the belief

Imperceptibly Garth was changing his attitude Calling him doc tor instead of the fool name they had given him was stimulating something still alive in his mind This was significant perhaps

You do not believe in the unconscious?

I must said Garth but in the sane individual it matters only in as much as it becomes the source of action that is to say when it becomes translated into the conscious The rest the waste material of the id is digested away

You seem very sure said Johnston I do not like your arbi trary distinctions between sane and not sane individuals And memory is not a cesspool. Time does not exist in the world of emo tions Don t you have dreams that you dreamed as a child?

I have no time for d eams said Garth. The rule precludes it

Which brings us to the subject of women said Johnston. He glanced at the confessor immobile t his table Can you give me a brief account of your sexual history?

Certainly said G rth I was a pagan

Johnston laughed That is brief he said He lit a cigarette again, placing the match on the table before him How old were you at the time of your first love affair?

Eighteen

Any homosexual experience?

I find your question offensive said Garth looking up

Please answer it

I have answered said Garth his eyes very much like his father s now suddenly unveiled and his hands which he had kept clasped now spread out emphatic on the table

Dentistry would have been easier thought Johnston. Aloud he said You know these questions are routine Very well let s continue By the way how old are you?

Twenty nine

You must have thought about marriage in the past.

Yes said Garth more evenly I have And decided against it.

You were engaged at one time Were you in love with the young woman?

Garth hesitated At one time yes he said I believe now that I was infatuated with an image of her which I created and which did not correspond with the reality When I became aware of that, I ceased loving her

Did the loss of that illusion create a gap in your life?

I continued my engagement to her for some time

Why?

I did not know how to break it off

At what time did you become aware of her deficiencies?

When I was overseas and received her first letter It was over written

Now I ve heard everything! thought Johnston Then to Garth, Did you mention this to her?

No but I changed the manner of my letters to her

Did you ever regret it? Miss her? Physically I mean

I said we were engaged said Garth his voice rising I didn t say we were lovers! The Confessor coughed discreetly We were not said Garth emphatically

I would like you to tell me how you first thought of religion?

As of something boring a set of practices that were a loss of time and an insult to the intelligence

What brought you then to this?

A friend

Johnston sighed. I wish you wouldn t force me to pull each

answer out of your mouth like an impacted tooth, he said I know I don t have your confidence Doctor Taikkes but you did agree to this and I came assured of your cooperation. You will not see me again

I am sorry said Garth. I was thinking only of myself I didn t realize—— His voice trailed off Johnston waited

It was in Korea where I was stationed said Garth after a moment s reflection I was in charge of the administration of a military hospital a job I disliked very much.

Why did you dislike it? said Johnston

I fancied myself a good surgeon said Garth. The job left me no time for surgery The neurosurgery in the hospital was botched.

Something in the voice vibrated For the second time since the beginning of the interview the monk was receding and the professional man was coming through

The techniques employed were steerage Nerve ends were approximated with sutures caught between cut ends brain wounds explored with gouges not with civilized instruments Blood vessels were not picked up carefully with consequent subdural haematomas the mortality rate was high the end results very poor I was unhappy about it

Could you do nothing about it?

I did what I could mostly transfer the patients elsewhere but some of the work was urgent I had to choose between the main job of serving the greatest numbers and my responsibilities to the few It was a hard choice

Did you do a good job of the organization work?

Yes said Garth considering

Considering what?

Considering how much I disliked being with people

You put it in the past Do you still dislike being with people?

Yes said Garth evenly

Do you feel that in the world you would have reconciled your dislike of people and your work in a hospital?

We were speaking of my conversion

Johnston glanced surreptitiously at his watch You do not have to follow a straight line he said.

I d rather said Garth It is easier for me. The front line medics are not the best, as you know They are raw just out of medical schools The specialists are in the rear hospitals where the final work is done In the hospital I am speaking of the most intelligent help I received was from an orderly A civilian a Chinese.

Red Chinese?

No said Garth. His mother was English He had been brought up in England. In 1948 he left Cambridge ostensibly to enter the Chinese army In reality he became an anti-communist agent in Korea How he got access to military data I ll never know We never discussed that part of it At any rate he was discovered to be a spy by the communists and managed to escape to our lines Because he could not prove his status—there were so many spies —we kept him as a prisoner He was made an orderly assigned to my hospital But he was not a well man

What was the matter with him?

He was in Seoul when the city was bombed During a short time thereafter he suffered anmesia He was a student of archaeology in England I should explain

He recovered his memory?

Yes He told me later that he wished he had not recovered. Because with his recovery there returned unbearably the memory of the things he had seen during the bombings one thing in particular a woman who had fled her home and had fallen in burning asphalt Her long hair had caught in it so she was glued there like a fly and burned to death in the molten street When the army entered Korea he was given a job with us I did not find him congenial but at night after my work as administration officer was more or less under control I worked in the operating room and Koye volunteered his services

Anything X rays lab work he assisted me while I operated. He was unskilled but admirably quick to learn and clever We never spoke to each other except in regard to the work. Finally this extreme silence became a bond between us and we learned to know each other He was a very unhappy man He had hated communism but the horrors of the defeat his family losses the sights he had witnessed the hopelessness of the future for his people were

oppressive to him. The role he had played while just and necessary was yet in conflict with the childhood concepts of patriotism and honour He felt he had been forced into a contemptible role for which there was no forgiveness He had hoped to die exposing himself to danger but had been miraculously spared At the hospital his work by day and night was a way of self destruction

What about you? Could you not pass the same judgment on your work?

He worked harder than I That was what I was trained for and loved

Go on said Johnston

As a Chinese he could not accept either the crimes of his people nor their punishment As Eurasian he could not enjoy the fruits of victory When we became friends he used to talk about the meaning of his life and its significance I recognized the trauma I tried as you are trying now sir to explore the various aspects of his personality hoping to find some hopeful role for him in the East I could not help him The conflict was too deep seated He had become intolerable to himself When I returned to the States I asked him to visit me as soon as the documents for his entry could be procured He refused I then asked our chief psychiatrist Dr Dorn to look after him He refused to see Dorn I had been in New York three months when I heard that he had hanged himself I like to believe that he did not know what he was doing

Had you talked about religion with him?

Yes He was groping I tried to substitute the concrete for the spiritual To keep him busy with things to manufacture a ready made set of patterns when he needed to abandon himself to the grace of God I realize now the harm I may have done him The uselessness of science before the urgings of the soul

Are --

That

it was ir

What I am trying to achieve is the total rejection of evil as exemplified by war by the infliction of torture by the stupid world choking its source of life Instead of trying to alleviate its evils as

a doctor I am trying to obtain by contemplation sacrifice and prayer the deliverance from evil.

Do you believe you can bring it about? said Johnston, aware of the unwanted note of acerbity in his voice.

I no The religious community as a whole ecclesiastical and lay yes

Have you received any directive about it? asked Johnston. "I mean have you heard voices seen visions?

Garth smiled No he said No hallucinations no levitations no hysteric Doctor That is what you meant to ask?

Yes said Johnston feeling cheap I think we have covered most of the ground. I regret Dr Taikkes having had to subject you to this test. Still I hope it may prove of some value to your father

Garth said nothing I would like to ask you something more now I promised your Superior that I would not question you about your life since your entry in the monastery as irrelevant to this interview Therefore answer me or not as you see fit. Suppose however that you were rejected from the monastery What would you do?

He heard the sharp intake of breath and looked curiously at the young man

I would attempt to lead the life of a Catholic outside the monastery

As a doctor?

I suppose so

Would that preclude marriage?

Well said Garth visibly surprised by the question this is an extraordinary thing to ask of me at the moment. You understand that nothing is farther from my thoughts No I suppose it would not necessarily preclude marriage I am not yet bound by vows

Johnston capped his pen assembled his notes thrust them in his pocket and stood up Well that is all he said I can only thank you now for putting up with this I hope this interview has not been disturbing

Garth stood up An indefinable change had come over his countenance He was once more the man of the world courteously

taking leave of a guest however unwelcome His eyes were upon Johnston s face as though he had for a moment forgotten his new self He barely repressed in time the gesture of extending his hand.

Have you any message for your father? asked Johnston facing h

u and Johnston saw only naked sorrow on the young man s face

Yes he said Tell him—tell him—to pray for me

What h

Tell h

voice Th

Dr Johnston turned to Father John of the Cross who rose and came to him I shall now take my leave Father he said

Would you said the old man give us your impression of our novice? Is he in your opinion a sane man or confused or what do you call it unb lanced?

From this sketchy examination said Johnston I would s

hardly think you have many run-of the mill postulants

I assure you every type of person lity is represented here said Father John of the Cross Just as in any community or any group But we most definitely reject the neurotics the escapists the glamour boys——

The glamour boys? asked Johnston not believing his ears

'There is a ce tain inverted glamour in total abnegation said the monk. A snobbishness turned upside-down Quite as dan gerous as the other Perhaps more Does that seem the case for your patient?

No said Johnston Very simply like most of us he is seeking happiness And I think he has found it I shall report to his father this much anyway and that there is no indication of mental disease as he feared nor of personality disorder

The wooden f ce of the monk did not change but there was

relief and a quickened warmth in his voice when he thanked the psychiatrist

I wish added Johnston that I could say as much for Garth s father

Are you concerned about him? asked Father John of the Cross.

Very much indeed said Johnston I don t know him well, but the man with whom I dealt today and yesterday is acting as though he had sustained a mutilating accident I have seen this sort of thing happen after castrating surgery The patient is unable to face what has happened and to accept the fact of his mutilation. Yes I am concerned. Of course he is not my patient.

Would you say asked the monk that his sanity is in danger?

No said Johnston I do not mean that He is not in danger of losing his mind But you have seen his behaviour this morning It is that of a man pretty close to despair a man who might do himself grave harm one way or the other Perhaps as a sort of revenge

I wonder said Father John of the Cross whether you would be good enough to call on our Superior with me?

Johnston looked at his watch, then shrugged his shoulders As you wish he said

13

At a quarter to eight Umberto knowing that Taikkes was to operate that morning and unable to wait any longer went up to the room of his master His orders were to waken him at six thirty Usually Taikkes was up when the valet entered his room but it had been nearly four o clock in the morning when the old man resting in an armchair in the doorway of his third floor room had heard T ikkes steps on the staircase And knowing that surgery seldom began before eight fifteen he had allowed the doctor the longest possible stretch of sleep Dr Taikkes might be angry but he would have rested.

He opened the door and remained stock-still his eyes unbeliev ing Then he rushed to the bed where Taikkes was lying sprawled half-dressed his coat flung carelessly to the floor Umberto s first thought was that his master was dead He put a trembling hand on the do f —
but the r
pulse anc

He had seen his master drunk twice only The first time was on the night of the birth of his son the second time when the fighting was over and he had known that Garth would be spared Umberto had drunk with him that night both of them sitting on the high stools of the pantry to begin with then in the armchairs of the study where they had awakened at dawn stiff sore ill and happy

But this was different Taikkes had not been happy recently He had not been himself since his son had gone crazy and buried him self in religion This morning there was no alcohol on his breath. Yet his sleep was that of a drunken man Umberto raised the eye-lid of the sleeping man with his finger The eye was dilated, the

pupil almost pushing all of the iris into a narrow blue rim. Then the doctor jerked his head let it roll on his pillow and went on sleeping

Umberto looked around him Drunk he thought but drunk on what? Nothing was disturbed in the pantry and last night, when Taikkes had come in his steps had sounded even and firm. Whatever he had taken he had taken right here The glass at the side of the bed was missing Umberto went into the bathroom. There, on the rim of the washbasin was the glass Beside it was a half filled medicine bottle He tried to read the label could not, uncorked and smelled it Chloral hydrate he thought recognizing its smell from the distant war years when he had worked as an orderly in the Italian army *Chloral hydrate It has come to that*

He went down the stairs to the kitchen nearly running took the coffee-pot from the table placed it on a tray picked up a cup and saucer and returned to Taikkes room He poured a cupful and placed it on the bedside table Then he seized his masters shoulders firmly and started to shake him

Doctor he said loudly Doctor! Wake up wake up! It is late There was no response Wake up Doctor! They want you in surgery

Taikkes forehead contracted a little and he made a gesture as though to edge away from Umberto The servant resolutely raised the old man slipped his arm under the heavy shoulders and lifted him from the pillow Get up sir he said Get up I have brought you some coffee

There was no answer Umberto went to the bathroom poured cold water on a towel and returning slapped Taikkes face with it gently with little strokes At last Taikkes grunted His hand went up to the towel and pulled it away from his face Then slowly his eyes came into focus He spoke but Umberto did not understand his words

What is it? said the valet What did you say Doctor?

With much difficulty Taikkes repeated articulating each word separately

Umberto shrugged his shoulders All right he said I ll go to the devil yes Doctor but not before I get you up Remember it

is Friday You are operating at eight Here is your coffee Doctor Here I ll hold it for you

Obediently Taikkes drank

You ve got two heads Umberto he said at last Two heads four eyes and two mouths and everything crooked

It s the drug said Umberto *S gnor Dottore* you should not have done that He shook his head disapprovingly You shouldn t do that to me You frighten me to death.

Taikkes looked at himself then and noticed his clothes I am a fool he said his mouth stiff and thickened by sleep Go get my bag Umberto I ve got some medicine in there

Must you? asked Umberto The coffee it is not enough?

No said Taikkes I operate this morning Glass of water—my bag—Dexadrine That will do it He pulled himself up with difficulty while Umberto found his bag and brought it to him Dexadrine he said again The pills

Umberto shook his head I cannot he said sorrowfully I cannot read the labels

Ah said Taikkes sitting up and looking with equal sadness into the blurred face of his old servant Ah Umberto your eyes are old but your heart is still young and loving Look how bent you are old brother ho v crooked your spine and fingers all swollen like an old tree s branches Thirty fou years you ve been with me thirty four years we ve been together and you ve helped me and cared for me and put up with me Was it for the money? Tell me Umberto was it for the money?

The old man smiled and sat down on the edge of the bed You know better than to say that he said

Yes said Taikkes I know better He took the bag from Umberto s hand and fumbling a little found a bottle and poured off a few pills in his trembling hand Yes Umberto You are the only one who cares They have all left but you ve remained. And nothing matters any more

Taikkes swallowed the pills and waited a little watching the old man s face gradually come into focus noting without emotion the tear swell on the everted lid and trembling there a moment be wiped out and crushed by the tip of Umberto s finger Cry he

said cry for us both old brother Because I am dried up and cannot any more

He turned then and let his legs down on the side of the bed Help me dress he said after draining the coffee from his cup and call Miller I must get to work.

It was twenty minutes past nine when Dr Taikkes smoothly [illegible]

There have been all sorts of messages for you Dr Taikkes, said the girl at the desk Wait I have a pile of them right here

Taikkes glanced at them then made a face So they started without me he said half to himself I ll be in surgery The rest will have to wait Call Lambriaco about the sternal fracture. I ll see the case as soon as I am through in Room G

He got off the elevator on the Surgical floor The secretary waved a piece of paper at him I have a message for you she said

Yes yes I know he said I ll be in G as soon as I am ready

He entered the doctors dressing room shed his clothes showered briefly again before putting on the white duck pants the white overhead short sleeved cotton shirt the white socks and shoes which were ready for him in his locker Tying on the strings of the cap he went to the scrub room for the final preparation

He felt quite well now wide-awake and pleasantly stimulated. His annoyance with Stull s decision to proceed with the case in his absence did not penetrate very deeply into his consciousness Why shouldn t he? he said to himself If it were Garth I d want him to Yes he thought but if it had been Garth I would have been here. And let him do it of course but watched him and assisted him He shrugged As though I were needed! He scrubbed automatically meticulously his hands so hardened by half a lifetime of brushing that his skin did not even redden under the hard strokes. And as he brushed his hands his eyes turned towards the operating room a corner of which was visible through the glassed in door

The X ray of the patient s chest was directly across from him,

transilluminated by the view box on which it was clamped Even at a distance Taikkes noticed the enlarged heart shadow the frail structure of the ribcage With sudden apprehension he pushed open the door with his shoulder and entered the room his hands clasped before him He examined the X ray more closely The soft tissue shadow the fragile covering of flesh whose outline went barely beyond the light bone of the thorax the blurred almost porous marking of the aorta struck his eye with the force of the accomplished fact. This patient will not survive he thought.

He looked around him saw the enormous number of blood soaked sponges rolled up for counting in a corner receptacle heard the suction coming from the densely surrounded operating table looked up at the intravenous transfusion bottles and exclaimed Can t you see the bottles are empty? Then to the anaesthetist You fool you d mned fool!

Nick Stribu turned to him, his eyes wild. The heart! he said. I can t get a pulse.

Rapidly Taikkes pulled on a pair of gloves and without taking [illegible] of the body and called to the surgical nurse A needle

The girl turned to her tray What kind she asked

Any kind Hurry!

She selected a needle and tried to thread it

Give it to me you damned fool! he said wrenching it from her

Dave Stull lifted his haggard face Heart in standstill he said.

Taikkes pricked the heart pricked it again No response. Adrenalin he said Two cc. Prepare a procaine drip The defibrillator Keep that lung going

The circulating nurse spoke The defibrillator is not sterile Doctor

Bring it in! he said. He took the syringe and injected the adrenalin into the heart cavity Push the transfusion fast, he said.

Nick the breathing bag under one hand, looked wildly at the intern. Blood, he said.

The intern unhooked the empty bottle and suspended a full one, then going to the other side pumped the last of the blood from the second bottle rapidly and replaced it with a new one. Taikkes his left hand under the heart, was squeezing it firmly against the chest wall squeezing the blood out into the arteries out into the dead limbs into the artificially breathing lungs into the blackness of the dreamless brain into the veins into the heart again and out again on its hopeless course throughout this opened thing which was no longer a woman

How long has the heart been still? he asked massaging with stiff fingers gummy and choked with blood

Just now said Stull. Just as you came in The aorta broke down when I put on the clamp Macaroni it felt like macaroni

Clean up that blood said Taikkes to Hornsby I want to see what goes on

Hornsby applied the suction again This time the field remained dry

The aorta is clamped said Taikkes The blood is circulating but there is no haemorrhage

Stull did not reply

Another cc of adrenalin said Taikkes I can get no response from the heart. Without stopping the massaging he injected the drug It s not going to work, he thought There is nothing to bring back Suddenly he felt a fluttering against the palm of his hand. The heart which was waxy pale began a wild erratic, unrhythmical fibrillation There is motion, he said but, as he said it, it stopped.

I have the defibrillator ready said the nurse Shall I connect it with the electricity?

Yes he said Cut it down to one ampere

Here you are said Hornsby taking the two electrodes from the nurse and holding the electric wires above the operative field.

Taikkes seized the electrodes placed one of them under the dead heart the other above and signalled to the nurse She stepped on the pedal and the current went through Nick gasped as the head of the patient slipped from under his hand pulled away by the arching which hurled the body upward in a violent contraction in

spite of the straps which maintained its arms and legs Then it fell back, the heart still without reaction Taikkes waited one second perspiration running down his neck then applied the electrodes again Again Mitsu bounded upward in the supreme futile con vulsion obeying even in death submitting to the forces which now had by passed her and would affect her no more Taikkes let the electrodes drop and put his hand on the heart, squeezed it once more recognized the presence of death in the flaccid tissue He pulled his hand away in a shudder of sorrow

Cardiac arrest, he said and pulling off his gloves walked out of the operating room.

14

THE GIRL at the Surgery Information Desk was new She had never seen Dr Taikkes smile so she took the rictus that pulled his lips away from his teeth and his vacant stare for a friendly grin. Hello she said. Remember me?

He stopped and looked at her then without answering went on to the dressing room.

Your message Dr Taikkes she said scrambling around her desk for the slip of paper Your message Don t you want it

No he said turning to her

Her smile faded But it s urgent she said going around the desk to catch up with him. I m not sure of the name but here it is From out of town.

He stopped. From out of town?

She held it out to him but he made no motion to take it. Dr Thomas she said I think it s doctor he said I m to call him back as soon as you can talk to him.

Taikkes took a deep breath. He rolled the slip of paper which he had at last accepted from her insistent hands and wished to jam it down her sweater between her ripe and insolent breasts Instead, he tossed it to the wastepaper basket in the corner of her cubicle.

That s that he said Call the Superintendent Report a surgical death The aortic aneurysm case Check on the name Find out where the relatives are I ll change clothes and speak to them

She stood open mouthed then pleasantly excited at the number and quality of the duties suddenly foisted upon her in the middle of a dull went to the desk Aortic aneurysm she said, checking th l list Here is the name Mitsu Watanabe be for her that the little man is waiting d up the phone Diana she said,

give me the boss No I want to speak to him myself Sure I ll wait.

She toyed with her earring then because the phone was pressing against it and bruised her lobe she slipped it off She waited impatiently for Dr Newcomb hoping that he would not hear of the accident before she had had a chance to speak to him She would be brief dignified and scientific Aortic aneurysm she repeated to herself wondering what it could mean The aortic aneurysm case I sure have an interesting job She glanced in the direction of the visitors room where the little man was waiting had been waiting for two hours Poor guy she thought In a couple of minutes he ll be a very unhappy little man I wonder if he ll cry? Do Japs cry as we do or do they save their faces? What do they save their faces for anyway? Okay Diana I ll wait Sure it s important Like a girl saving herself for the right man How do you know it s the right one? How can you be sure?

She saw Dr Petrie get out of the elevator walk to the rack and pick up her white coat Have you heard about the aortic aneurysm case Dr Petrie? she said pleasantly rubbing her itching ear with the telephone receiver

Yes said Petra It s my patient

Jean felt let down Oh she said News travels fast

Petra fastened her coat News? she said then she looked afraid What news? What do you mean?

[illegible]

He took her arm and plunged his five fingers into the strong warm flesh above the elbow kneading it harshly happy in his palms to forget the flaccid engorged heart the sticky slippery unresisting pocket of muscle whose motor was gone

Petra he said the girl is dead

Hurriedly the receptionist started talking in a breathless voice Dr Newcomb she said. Miss Armbrewster in Surgery I wish to report an operative death. A Mrs Watanabe Yes that s right W A T A N A B E A case of aortic aneurysm of the aorta She shot up a triumphant glance at the two doctors walk

ing away from her with no more consideration than if she had been a post or a picket A patient of Dr Theodora Petrie, operated on by Dr Taikkes That s right In surgery

No no said Petra No not Mitsu It isn t Mitsu you re talking about is it? Is it Taikker is it Mitsu?

I don t know what you call her he said Come on inside

Still holding her by the arm in spite of her gesture to pull away from his tight fingers he drew her into the dressing room. Standing on one foot the brain surgeon Chester Coon lately of Boston, was pulling off his pants He emitted a high squeal and hopped on one foot into a corner behind a cloak rack. Petra s eyes brushed by him and turned to Taikkes

You were *there?* she said.

I did my damnedest he said But there was nothing to do The aorta was rotted through in the first place That ass of a Stull should have seen it on the X ray

What happened? said Petra

He put in the clamp and it went straight through I don t know whether she died of the shock or of the haemorrhage Probably both

Oh Taikker! she said And I sent her to this!

You should have known better he said I knew she was dead before I ever looked at her Her X ray told me she wouldn t take it Not the size of the sac just the look of her She wouldn t stand a tonsillectomy

But she stood a Caesarean said Petra I took care of her when I was at Charity and did the Caesarean myself

That was years ago said Taikkes She s grown worse And then to top it off while Stull rips the aorta the blood transfusion runs dry and nobody noticed When I got to the table the bottles were empty at the time they should have been pushing it into her with an airplane engine

Stirbu she thought but did not say it

Couldn t you get the heart started?

Of course I got the heart started he said but there was nothing to keep it going We got the defibrillator but you might as

well have tied it to the Republican Party Sure it jumped but so what? I couldn t keep it up all day and even if I had——

Oh Mitsu she said. My poor Mitsu

Don t take it that hard, said Taikkes She didn t have a China man s chance Surgery or not she d be dead in six months

But I sent her to this said Petra and sat down She had two children she wanted to get well and I promised her I d be there when she d wake up——

Don t start that said Taikkes I m damned sorry about it, but what s done is done

But I didn t—— said Petra. You see I asked her to come She started to cry

What s the matter with her? asked Coon emerging fully clothed from behind the hatrack.

I killed her patient said Taikkes bitterly

Oh did you? asked Coon a polite frown of concern on his rosy golden face his big boy arms floating to his side That s too bad It happens you know he s id to Petra s bent head it happens to me all the time In my specialty you learn to take it Well he said patting Petra on the shoulder chin up Doctor we all do the best we can

He went out rapidly glad to escape from the scene hoping that in her shock Pet had not had time to notice the ridiculous image he had presented when she entered the room and relieved a little that patients other than his died on the table occasionally Heart surgery was hard but brain was worse Ungrateful work he thought making his way out into the elevator and down to the lobby ungrateful ingrate and gloomy and he wouldn t change sp

for Petra to recover her ca w in his heart So Father Thomas called he thought I should have talked to him There is plenty I could say to him If I hadn t been such a damn fool last night—either you take chloral and don t do the job or else you leave it alone you son of a bitch—he said to himself angrily You killed that girl all right my dear boy he said to Garth in his mind you holy man you holier than I too holy for this world you killed

her with Stull s hands instead of saving her with your own as you and I together might have saved her

You d better stop this he said to Petra. I feel bad enough without having to go through this And I should go talk to her husband I understand there s some man waiting for the end— there in the waiting room.

Oh said Petra standing up her face battered but handsomer still he thought under the good scrubbing of tears and honest sorrow open and speakable sorrow that s her brother He s wait ing for me I d better go in with you

I d rather do it alone said Taikkes It s easier that way You may talk to him later if you want to But this is my job

She followed him out to the waiting room door He turned then to her

Petra he said you know it isn t anybody s fault but my own You know that don t you?

She sought his hand but he had turned brusquely away and she only met the coat sleeve which flitted by her fingers Taikker—— she said but the door closed and she remained alone Her hand fell to her side Then hesitantly she turned toward Room G

The man stood up when Dr Taikkes entered He was taller than most Orientals young with a long neck on which a small head fitted gracefully small flat ears and an in turned look ti htened and sealed by the fold at the corners of the eyes

I am Dr Taikkes said the older man Sit down

The room was small full of cigarette smoke Taikkes went to the single high window and threw it open Let s have some air he said

The young man watched him containing himself until Taikkes had taken a seat then he leaned forward My sister he said stiffly how is she?

He is bracing himself for bad news thought Taikkes But not that bad not this I am sorry he said aloud When we operated we found a condition more serious than we had supposed

The young man gathered himself with obvious effort. Please he said please tell me How is she?

The sentences that Taikkes had called to his mind came and went without stopping It s no use being careful about it he thought It s undignified and insulting to him. To us both I must tell him now But still the words refused to come I can t admit it I can t admit I have killed her

She is very sick said the young man with a trembling voice begging to be contradicted

Yes said Taikkes He took a deep breath I am terribly sorry But the shock of the operation was too much We could not save her

Mitsu s brother kept on looking at him intently waiting for more words to come the words which would tell him that he had misunderstood that there was some new angle to the situation that something would be required of him something else terrible sacrificial but which would still contain life

She died said Taikkes during the operation

The young man shot to his feet How he said how how is that? She didn t—where is she? He went to the door and came back to Taikkes Where is she? he said urgently begging him with sharp choked sounds Mitsu he said incoherently I have waited—to see her Now—get me—no he said not Mitsu not dead?

You can t see her now said Taikkes bringing him back from the door There is nothing we can do We must wait

But I came from Chicago said the young man with the same air of disordered preoccupation to see her Doctor she isn t dead—now?

I am sorry said Taikkes We did everything we could. Everything

I want to see her said the young man It s my sister you know he said eagerly his eyes darting around the room as though to find an issue from which he could escape since now the door was forbidden

I ll take you to her said Taikkes Later His hands were clenched. Please sit down he said. Try to be calm. She could not live. It s a terrible thing but at least——

The young man came to him made an effort to listen and then

started again pacing around the room walking close to the wall, and returned to

you say There s no *but* I had the money I gave it to her She said no there was no need of money She d have the best doctor anyway That s what she said you see All right I took it back. I took it back, you see he shouted I took it back!

ight—all right. but I have to

Please be calm said Taikkes It s only his sister he thought, and it is my son. She s not suffering any more.

The young man stopped still backed up against the wall which he struck with the palms of his hands She died he said. She suffered till she died and now you tell me——

She didn t suffer said Taikkes She went to sleep very naturally I can t stand it he thought I can t stand it any more. She went to sleep hoping

Oh oh oh—— said the young man He crashed into a chair He put his head into his hands and jerked it up again. Listen he said Let me see her will you? Doctor—I can t believe you see

I came from Chicago he added She said she didn t need money for the operation—so I thought I d come here and wait till she was well and take her back with me With the children—— He interrupted himself What the hell he said That s nothing to you After a moment he went on She couldn t keep on staying there you know with that bitch of a landlady It was bad for the boys I thought it was the right thing for her to have the operation here Oh Doctor he cried suddenly his face grimacing under a gush of tears There s something—can t you do something now! Hurry hurry up! Is there nothing—are you sure there is nothing—Mitsu! he said and started sobbin Mitsu oh damn oh damn it Mitsu

Taikkes got up and found his knees were trembling He steadied himself with an effort and went out of the room

15

Dr Taikkes ran straight into Dave Stull outside the waiting room

The brother s in there isn t he? asked the young surgeon You broke it to him Dr Taikkes?

Taikkes nodded and tried to push past him. I d better go in and explain Stull said These people usually want an explanation How is he taking it?

Taikkes felt the blood rushing to his head. These people, he said, these people! He put out a convulsive hand grasped Dave s surgical gown in the middle of his chest twisting and nearly tearing it off his body

Stull wrenched himself free with a gasp of surprise Why he said Dr Taikkes——

But Taikkes seized him again and pushed him before him into the dressing room at the end of the corridor He was shaking now and could barely control his voice These people want an explanation he said Indeed sir these people want an explanation! A woman croaks under your hands in surgery and you are ready to oblige these people!

I meant to say Stull began but Taikkes went on without listening

And so you get your little diagrams ready with pencil and paper! What the devil did they fill your belly with you bastard? Sterile cotton and hygienic gauze or have you bowels that move and blood and the organs of a man?

David Stull turned white I don t know what you mean he said. I have not deserved this sir The patient died—I have done what I could—it was an accident—I intend—— No he said with dignity wait a minute You will let me speak. I intend to explain certainly It is my duty and it is my right.

You have no right you have no duty said Taikkes in the same high breathless voice except those I give to you. You will not go in there you will not touch that man. In your surgical gown too! he cried With your synthetic heart! You have no right in there!

But I don t understand said Stull I don t understand what has come over you Are you blaming me for her death, Doctor? Have I been at fault in any way?

I blame you for nothing said Taikkes

But I believe you do said Stull And I want to know what I am accused of I had your permission to operate on this patient—— This was the understanding The girl knew it Petra knew it. You were to be there You came in you saw the situation was critical—that nothing could be done——

Critical! said Taikkes The patient was dead, you damn fool!

Would you say said Stull with supreme calm perspiration starting from under his surgical cap and rolling down his temples would you say I killed the patient Dr Taikkes?

What are you to me that I should answer your questions said Taikkes you pompous fool!

Just a minute said Stull I am your assistant I have been entrusted with a dangerous operation on a desperately ill woman. You have entrusted me with it I am your assistant and I did it I did the best I know how with the best of my knowledge and the best of my skill I have failed I have the right to know and you must answer me Have I killed the patient Dr Taikkes?

You know damn well you have said Taikkes

Stull wiped his brow then taking off the surgical cap rubbed his forehead his face and the back of his neck with the crumpled cloth I don t believe it he said at last I don t believe anyone could have done better I tried—— Why sir he cried you couldn t have saved her I tell you the clamp went straight through

——

I wouldn t have tried said Taikkes calm now I wouldn t have put in the clamp

But how was I to know? asked Stull

Yes said Taikkes how were you to know! He took a few

But Stull remained immobile his eyes black and sick in the whitish face Dr Taikkes he said I believe you are dreadfully wrong but if I have been at fault there is only one thing for me to do I am resigning

He waited a second so intent and so taut that his breath remained caught in his chest but Taikkes only turned away from him with an impatient gesture of the hand

I resign repeated Stull He went to his locker and started to change his clothes Shortly after Taikkes heard the door close behind him

Well said Taikkes I guess I am rid of that bastard!

He looked around him trying to locate the sound that he had heard In the lounge part of the dressing room behind the row of lockers he heard the sound again—as of a chair pushed away—then the sound of footsteps Dr Sandstrom came around the corner an unlighted cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth He looked upset thought Taikkes upset and as usual unkempt with his troubled myopic eyes focussing vaguely before him with his

cigarette in the pocket of his pants What were you doing there?

I was hiding said Sandstrom for fear of adding to that boy s embarrassment I must say he added I have never heard a more disgusting scene

You what! said Taikkes

fired if you so please but I don t care——

What are you talking about? said Taikkes

About Dave Stull said Sandstrom I don t know what hap-

pened in surgery and I don t think it matters The girl was doomed anyway And I certainly don t care a snap of my fingers for Stull He s not my kind But what I want to say to you——

I don t care about what you want to say said Taikkes Go comb your hair you sap and get a coat that fits you. You are a disgrace to the hospital

And what I will say continued Sandstrom without pause his voice rising is that you ve been unfair and cruel to Dave Yes unfair and cruel—and I could say more

But you won t said Taikkes strangely calm. This has been your speech of the year You ll keep on worrying about it for the rest of your life Now do me a favour Go into the visitors room and take care of that Chinaman for me You know what needs to be done—signatures for autopsy release of the body and so on Find out if he needs any help Give it to him The funeral arrangements will be on me Get the Superintendent s secretary to help you with it I think the woman left some children. I don t know how many See what needs to be done about them. Will you do that?

I haven t had lunch said Sandstrom grudgingly

Neither has he said Taikkes Get him to have a drink any way He ll feel better and then he ll eat Go on champion of the underdog do your stuff

Well said Sandstrom his fair skin flushing

Comb your hair first said Taikkes as he left the room or he ll be sure he s having a nightmare

I want Dr Petrie said Taikkes to the surgical clerk. Can you find her for me?

She s in there said Lucy nodding her head to the visitors lounge with Mr Yishimoru Shall I call her now?

Wait said Dr Taikkes He stood there one moment watching the coming and going of nurses interns and orderlies passing through the surgical corridors the patients wheeled upon their carts and then the thing he expected but hoped not to have to see wheeled out of Room G The cart with something at once rigid and abandoned closely wrapped and unrecognizable under

the sheet, taken to the back elevator Hornsby was pushing the cart. Behind him walked Nicholas Surbu, yellow faced and drawn.

I like that boy thought Taikkes I think I could do something with him. As though he could be leavened. Not like Dave Stull who thinks only of himself Wha did he say? I was hard on him? Of course I was hard. I was enraged. I am still enraged. All he could feel was that he was affronted. All he could say was I have done my best—it is my patient—I will explain—I have the right. Heavens he thought, Stull on one hand, turning dials pushing levers and Garth on the other without ballast without a guy rope going straight up like a balloon Aren t there men any more just plain men like me? I won t try any more he thought I can t take it. If Stull quits I m through also And glad of it I don t have the heart to train new boy any more It takes hope it takes [illegible]

a damn. I want Petra

Go call Dr Petrie he told the clerk. Tell her to join me in the library I ll wait for her Then Wait, he added his fingers fumbling for a chequebook in his pockets Wait. He tore a cheque from the folder picked up a pen scribbled a figure and his signature and folding it gave it to the girl To Dr Sand strom he said, and try to be inconspicuous about it. It s for the Chinaman s expenses

Without waiting for the elevator because at this moment he feared to meet the eyes of his colleagues so haggard did he feel his face to be he took the stairway to the fifth floor

The library was always deserted during the day He was disappointed when he saw someone sitting in one of the armchairs near the window A girl A little slip of a girl. He came nearer Dido

Dido he said and she rose and came to him Then he remem bered Not Dido but D do Stull Dave Stull s wife And his face hardened. What are you doing here? he asked This is off your beat

I m waiting for Dave she said. I left a message for him to

call me when he d be through surgery It s nearly one o clock Aren t they through yet up there?

Yes said Taikkes They re through.

What could he be doing? she said Or did he get the message at all?

With whom did you leave it? he asked

I told that woman doctor You know that swish looking tall girl Dr Taikkes said Dido coming close to him the girl Dave was operating on how did she come through? Is she all right?

No said Taikkes She died

Oh! cried Dido She backed away her face contracted, her hands contracted her body contracted as if wounded as if in pain, backing up and knocking a table and folding herself into a chair doubled up as though tightening herself around a wound around a gush of blood that should not pour out Oh Mitsu! Poor poor Mitsu Dave why did you do that to her?

Taikkes walked away from her to the window He pushed away the brightly printed cretonne and looked into the street Will this never end? he thought Must they all go into convulsions over a woman who couldn t live? But she couldn t live he said over his shoulder Pull yourself together Dido Your husband didn t make a scene

— w

I

How did you know? asked Taikkes curiously and inside himself he was saying she will be quite ugly ten years from now she isn t as pretty as when I first knew her She s lost her freshness She won t last with him How did you know? Dave didn t know

I didn t know she said but I was scared I told him— Where is the little girls room? she asked. I ve got to go I m going to be sick.

That s all I need he thought bitterly and to her That s silly he said You don t have to be sick Come I ll take you to Emergency You ll find a to[illegible] —and somebody to take care of you.

follow[illegible] obediently very pale now and dignified,

down the corridor down in the elevator into the mysterious works of the hospital s insides and reached Emergency where she could rush away from him and sweat it out alone

It s Dr Stull s wife said Taikkes to the Emergency nurse I think she ll be all right but she may be pregnant You d better send somebody home with her one of the students if you can spare her She s high strung and she s had a shock I think she shouldn t be alone

I don t know who I can spare said the nurse I m always shorthanded down here But I ll find s mebody don t you worry about it Has Dr Stull been advised?

No said Taikkes You might do that But I have an idea he might be home anyway Use your own judgment

Petra! he said At last!

She put down the book she had been vaguely looking at and turned to him. Taikker she said what is it? What can I do?

He did not answer He took her hands in his and led her to the armchair where Dido had been sitting a few minutes earlier and drawing up a chair sat down in front of her Now he said talk.

Talk about what? she

No said Taikkes I
been yelling my head off
body Ever since that thing
don t deny it I know Not her death I feel no responsibility about that Here and now or there in three weeks—it amounts to the same thing and this way may have been easier Myself I d rather go this way quietly But she was your patient and it shouldn t have happened And I don t want you to hate me for it

She looked at him with her direct open glance in which the whole woman kindly compassionate was revealed He noticed the dark bruised area under the eyes the broken planes of her face which was no longer young the mouth swollen and dry from which she had bitten off the lipstick, and he yearned to take her into his arms

Do you hate me Petra?

Taikker she said why do you talk nonsense? Her eyes were steady but he felt her warmth coming to him something which, if it wasn t love was its sibling something which raked him inside achingly and yet the pain was a comfort and a benediction. He leaned toward her took her hands and rising lifted her to her feet and pressed her against him holding her tighter and yet tighter feeling with an exaltation he had forgotten the pliant body against his chest her whole body not giving in but not resisting the goodness of her not offered nor urged as the mother s milk is not pressed but allowed to flow He felt her force flowing into him who had seemed the stronger and buried his face in her neck.

She let him stay against her then gently pulled away from him.

Petra he said.

Come she said and lifting her hand held it a little against his cheek come Taikker you mustn t disorganize me I have feelings too

Petra he said taking her hand Petra come to me Come to me as you used to Come and stay with me tonight Petra. I need you, Petra as I ve never needed you before.

I can t she said her eyes troubled.

You can he said You used to Remember it wasn t so long ago The other night you wanted to didn t you? I didn t care I couldn t trouble you again. But I need you Petra I cannot sleep alone

She hesitated I can t tonight, she said

I won t bother you he said misunderstanding I won t bother you if you don t want me to Just come and stay with me.

I can t she said again thinking of the other man, her husband that was who would be with her that night the man who was willing to throw away all his carefully built up life for the sake of her his woman I can t Taikker I m sorry

He dropped her hand All right he said dully As you wish, Petra He turned but she called him back.

Taikker she said that boy——

What boy?

Nicholas Sirbu she said. You know the anaesthetist this morning I don t know what happened—I didn t get the whole

story—but you said something pretty harsh to him I don t know what it was You were probably right but the kid is just sick about it

Surbu? he said The one they call Nicky?

'Yes she said The dark youngster with the big ears He feels that it s all his fault He won t even look at people It s hard on him He s so young

What do you want me to do about it? said Taikkes He wasn t watching his transfusion bottles It didn t make any difference anyway But he ought to learn Hell this isn t a kindergarten you know I had to take worse than that when I was his age Old Breckenbridge was a terror——

Please she said. You re probably right I m sure you are But it is hard on the kid. I tell you he looks stricken

Tell him anything you want he said I don t care Tell him I m crazy that I ve got to blow up to let off steam It s the truth anyway Tell him I shall personally tender him my apologies

But I mean it she said.

Well what do you want me to do? Straighten it out any way you think best I don t want him to commit suicide because an old [illegible]

way Thanks Taikker

With the same gesture they turned to each other This time their lips met in a hard brief kiss

Don t let that kid fall in love with you he said. Perhaps for his peace of mind, I d better speak to him myself

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It was nearly two o clock when Theodora Petrie reached her office She was one hour late for her appointments and having had no lunch very hungry After leaving Taikkes she had put in a call for Nick through the loud speaker operator and had waited a long time for him to call back There had been no answer She had no patient in the hospital now and nothing to do there so she waited impatiently beside the telephone thinking of her delayed afternoon appointments of the crowded schedule of her early date that night with Herb She heard Dr Taikkes name called several times on the loud-speaker and Nick s Finally when her phone rang the operator told her that Stribu signing out to Sandstrom had left the hospital for the afternoon She felt sorry that she had not reached him earlier thinking of his grieving dark face when she had left the operating room then shrugged her shoulders She had other duties more pressing to attend to

Petra shared her office with three other women physicians It was a suite of two offices six patient cubicles a laboratory and a small cheerful waiting room On Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays Theodora Petrie practised general medicine while Virginia Carroll in the other office saw her own obstetrics ar d gynaecological cases On Tuesdays Thursdays and Saturdays Petra made house and hospital calls while the office was taken over by an elderly paediatrician a severe woman of the old school and a child psychiatrist The expenses of the office and the nur were shared equally by the four women and the practice of women patients mothers and children was often shared as well All n all it was a good a pleasant arrangement Whenever Petra met a problem too complex for easy solution she called on her colleagues for discussion or on one of the specialists at Musurus Hospital

It was with relief that she entered the reception room that Friday afternoon and glanced around her meeting with a cheerful smile the anxious eyes of her patients I m sorry I am late she said to Wendy Blaskowitch the pretty snub-nosed young girl who was the office secretary I was delayed at the hospital At that I had to leave earlier than I should have Please call Musurus and leave a message at the switchboard for me

Yes Dr Petrie said Wendy drawing a note pad toward her What is the message?

Have Dr Surbu call me whenever he comes in said Petra If I have left the office by the time he gets there he is to call me at home I ll be out for dinner but will be home by ten surely It is important that I get hold of him today

Very well said Wendy I ll send in your first patient as soon as you are ready You ll be busy this fternoon

And busy she was The anaemic girl with painful menses was followed by the hypertension case with ringing of the ears The young bride whose blood test Petra had run the week before was back for the shots required before going to Mexico for her honey moon The boy and girl twins both acne ridden came for the result of their metabolism tests and a thyroid prescription The young pianist with frightened eyes who h d fallen on the street the day before came in limping She didn t think her hip was broken but it was and Petra made arrangements to have her admitted at Musurus and pinned together by the chief orthopaedist It s not a bad fracture she said reassuringly to the girl and it will take all of six months before the pins are taken out but you ll have no cast and be hopping on crutches in three days There s no reason to think you won t walk as straight as before Then there was the woman grey haired and shy the gentle spoken woman who felt ashamed of the lump she was growing who had not spoken of it to her d ughter It didn t hurt she said but hot packs had not helped and sunray lamps had not helped so she had thought— Yes said Petra she was right yes t was a tumour it would have to be taken out yes right aw y What was the use of waiting and worrying about it the worst was always before surgery counting the days counting the hours No we won t put it off she said,

dialling Musurus again for arrangements Just think how wonderful it will be to wake up at this hour tomorrow and be rid both of the lump and of the worry She smiled at the woman and helped her zip her dress There were no signs of spreading that she could find. It was early enough it was wonderful to be able to smile at her comfortingly encouragingly It was early enough. Please God, let it be.

Then Mrs Marriott came in. Fifteen minutes of complaints about gas pains and her daughter in law Fifteen minutes by the clock after which Petra dismissed her and opened the window to blow away the heavy musk fragrance that clung to the woman s outrageous clothes And then the rheumatic heart case who was doing better so much better after penicillin the asthma case—to be referred to an allergist the two sisters middle-aged and laughing who together weighed five hundred pounds and who were really going to start on that diet if the doctor was willing to try them just once more

And then it was six o clock the waiting room was empty at last and Wendy was putting on her hat Any call from Musurus? asked Petra sprawled in the deepest armchair and lighting a cigarette

No said Wendy but there is a message for you. Here she said from a Mr Nichols Herbert Nichols He said he would pick you up here at six thirty

All right said Petra That will give me time to make myself beautiful.

You ve got a *date?* asked Wendy unbelievingly looking embarrassed at the kiddish behaviour of her boss

Yes gorgeous said Petra I ve a date and you d better roll out of here quick. I want to keep him to myself

Left alone she locked the office door kicked her shoes across the room went to the laboratory and cleaned up Then with a towel wrung out of hot water over her face she set the X ray alarm timer stretched on the patient s table turned on dance music on the radio and promptly went to sl ep Half an hour later refreshed and quite herself again in her jersey dress and dark coat she opened the door and looked up into Herbert s face.

He came in easily happily with the same effusion of good health of good spirits with the same glow of good looks that had thrilled her fifteen years ago when she had first met him and which now stunned her again so similar was he to her idea of him and so different from the letter she had received and from the voice t

down Thea he said this is almost too much for me

Is it? she asked Have I changed so much? Is it such a shock?

He shook his head. Changed? he said No Or if you have it s good. It s a flowering a blossoming out——

Come come said Petra You mean I ve gained weight All right I have

It s good he repeated And your hair is different You used to wear it like a boy short short short and straight And we used to quarrel about it once every three weeks every time you had it cut And then you leave me and blossom out as a woman

Not very tactful is it? she said I always do everything wrong first

And then he said you straighten them out.

Sometimes she said You look darn well yourself You look twenty five just as you did when I first saw you How do you do it Herb? How c n you look so well Herb she thought how can you look so happy today how can you not be touched by what has happened this morning how can this day ha e gone around and into you without a stain on you or a trace of anguish? Should n t you tell me since I am a woman and looking halfway decent is part of our business?

I have been living in a dream he said as if in answe to her thoughts I have been crazy since l st week since talking to you Until this morning I didn t believe you would let me come It s dumb for me to tell you this but I h ve called you so often before You cruel wench he said getting up and coming to her sitting beside her on the a m of the chair I haven t been able to do a thing I had people to see I had to go to the law library I had to go

to city hall and I went but I remember nothing of my work there It will all have to be done again I ll have to come back next week. But I am so darn happy at seeing you I mean it doesn t matter

D n t take the bit in your teeth Herb she said with a smile Lots of people see me every day without losing their minds

I don t believe it, he said firmly And if they don t they must be crazy already It amounts to the same thing

She got up His shoulder was too close to hers She couldn t look in his eyes as he spoke and she feared the weight of his body would break the arm of her eighty dollar chair Let s go she said. I ha e not eaten since breakfast this morning and since this is going to be a free meal I intend to eat for hours Where are we going?

Wherever you want he said Is the Black Tower all right? There is a new show opening there Have you seen it?

No she said I d like to

Mitsu s eyes looked at her unhoping abandoned You wouldn t do it she was whispering and the lids closed and the lips pulled away in a smile

I d like to very much she said It s been months since I have laughed I hope it s loud noisy and corny as corn

That s the gal for me he said Where s your coat There? he looked around him and for the first time saw the office and whistled. A swell setup you ve got here he said All of this yours?

A quarter of it she said Three other women physicians split it with me Cheaper that way and better company

All women? he asked holding her coat for her Gosh, it sounds awful And you live with a bunch of gals too I suppose

No she said I don t. It would cramp my style She regretted her words when she saw his face darken but before she had time to think about it the telephone rang

It s too late he said Don t answer it

She picked up the receiver Yes? she said Oh, hello Sandstrom

You called Stirbu said Sandstrom over the wire The operator said it was important Anything I should know about?

Petra hesitated. Well she said I don t know what to say I was speaking to Taikkes at noon about the unpleasantness this

morning you know his unpleasantness to Sirbu and I think he regretted having been brutal about it. I wanted to tell Sirbu about it, that s all.

Well said Sandstrom that s darned white of you Petra I wish somebody would do something about the kid. But no one knows where he is He just signed off to me and vamoosed.

Didn t he come in for dinner? said Petra Wasn t he in the dining room?

No said Sandstrom That s when I got worried and called his home I thought he might have gone home to mother you know But she didn t know anything about him So I had to reassure *her* and that was a job Those foreign mothers heaven deliver us!

Damn, said Petra Now I am worried.

Well said Sandstrom, I don t think he d go and hurt himself It wasn t his fault after all By the way there won t be an autopsy The guy refused the authorization

Ah she said and the woman in her was relieved stupidly instinctively as though she had never heard of medicine I m going out now Sandy When he does come in have him call me I ll be in by ten She hung up

What makes you think you ll be in by ten? said her ex husband with a questioning look on his face

I m a working woman, she said I always turn in early

I ll take you home early he said taking her arm and holding her close and the meaning in his vo ce did not escape her

She had a martini and while eating she drank the light Dezaley wine with the shrimps and with the meat she drank St Emilion Between courses they danced Returning from the dance floor she found Herb had ordered a bottle of champagne and it pleased her as though she was very young now and taken out for he b thday by this boy who was not her husband and never had been but was somebody new attentive and enthralling with all sorts of delirious promises of secret happiness of extrao dinary voyages of exotic vistas for her because she was young beautiful exalted and once more, a virgin And the man hell bent on seduction.

And all the time she talked. She could not stop talking The wine which she seldom drank, released in her all the bonds with

which at all times she was so tightly fettered No one knew of these bonds no one that is except Taikkes who knew that her free manner and her frank speech which in others would have been excessive was for her the very minimum of force which had to escape or if not escape choke her She who had meant to be urbane and wise sophisticated and kind who had meant to make the man talk and to hear him tell of his love of his need for her who had meant—yes in spite of what she had told Sandy that morning—who had meant to give him hope to try again, to return to her man and her home to be somebody s wife—no not somebody s—Herb s and find in his arms the completion of herself without which she was only a tool a useful tool indeed, but inanimate not joined in fruition not growing who had meant to listen and encourage she talked incessantly irrelevantly and could not seem to stop

She talked of her life of her apartment of her furniture and her curtains and the trouble she had had matching them of the roommate she had had and who now thank God had gone to the army to find herself a man of the parties she had given and of her friends and the parties she had gone to and what had happened there of the auxiliary and the doctors wives of the work she was doing three mornings a week at the university in the heart research lab And all the time she was skirting closer and closer to Mitsu who was lying quietly her slanting eyes obstinately open, in the chilly core of herself that music did not reach that was not warmed by wine Mitsu mute and not reproaching who was looking at her

At nine o clock, the first show went on It was very funny very loud and she laughed Herb who had looked worried now forgot about her and laughed too the full happy laughter of men satisfying and real He took her arm in the crowded space of the pushed together tables pressed her against him and held her hand For a fraction of a second she let her head rest against his shoulder then turned a little and pressed her forehead into it, feeling warm feeling right at last Mitsu covered away vanishing from her consciousness She felt his lips brush her hair and lifting her head looked in his eyes and the drunk agitation that had pos-

sessed her dropped off all at once She was herself now awake and content Thea Petrie with Herb Nichols who was handsome and loving and all the petty and ridiculous strife about who was the stronger about who should do which about her work and his and the place where they should live fell into place as the puny things that had no real meaning between a man and a woman who belonged together

The four peacock girls were galloping on the stage batting their incandescent neon wings She pulled away from him and watched without seeing feeling his eyes on her Thea Petrie she thought, Petra no more Thea and Herb Just as it used to be Soon again Thea and Herb Nichols That s all I give up

You look tired Thea he said And ten o clock is around the corner Shall we go?

Yes she said It s nice of you to remember I had forgotten I have quite a day tomorrow

He paid the check, left the nicely computed tip for the waiter helped her with her coat disappeared one moment and reappeared with his and they went out together into the harsh February wind.

Go back inside he said I ll get my car Then he was driving up and they were close again his arm around her her face against his He kissed her Darling he said why have you made me wait so long?

She drew away from him Why why do you draw away why don t you answer his kiss? Why don t you tell him why don t you let him know? This is what you want You will be home soon you have to decide to decide now You have decided remember? This is your man You have yield d Don t start fighting gain.

Herb she said, don t, darling I am exhausted It s been a frightful day

Why he said starting the car what has happened? Was it worse than usual?

Yes she said, it has been

Yes cried Mitsu it has been It was my last and I do not feel the night I do not feel the night nor the cold nor the wind. I do not feel the sheet around me nor the hardness and the narrowness of

my bed I do not hear my children s voices I shall not see the colour of tomorrow

You are crying said Herb Thea what is the matter?

And so she told him while he drove into the park, around the lagoon and into a driveway forgotten by all the other winter lovers she told him about Mitsu sobbing at first and then more quietly and he was quiet judicious and tranquil. He followed Mitsu easily from happy childhood in California from the father s tree nursery to high school to the great exciting trip to Japan to the finishing school near Tokyo where she a Nisei had been a foreigner among the people of her blood and colour just as she was a foreigner in California among the people of her birth and language He followed her at the moment of decision when, in October 1941 she decided to return to the country of her birth only to find her father burning all the things she had brought back from Japan and burning also at a last fearful sacrifice, the portrait of the Son of Heaven the Emperor Hirohito

He followed Mitsu into the freezing huts of the relocation camp where crowded with her brother and her parents around the small makeshift stove she had coughed through the long winters of Idaho her feet numb in the canvas shoes that were right for a school girl in California but not a prisoner in slat walled, tar papered sheds where she had been thrown He saw her grow thin on a riceless diet he saw her ministering to her father who died at last from a lung haemorrhage He saw Mitsu in New York, the war ended find a job as kitchen helper in the Y cafeteria and then fall in love with the first man who made love to her He saw her at her first delivery in Charity Hospital delivered by Caesarean section under local to reduce the danger of shock because inexplicably the circulation was fouled up the heart inadequate the blood pressure critical He saw his wife later after a clinical survey telling the girl that there was something wrong with her artery that she should have no more children He saw Mitsu return to the same hospital five years later her husband gone but heavy with child calling for Petra who was not there going through a second Caesarean successfully miraculously escaping death again taking into her arms a live healthy boy Her last now No more Mitsu.

We ve done it twice We might not do it again But look at him Doctor look at him! My son!

He saw Petra discuss with Taikkes the girl s chances of admission at Musurus and of being operated on And Taikkes giving her his consent and promising to see the patient himself although she was only a charity case and of being there at surgery He stood beside Petra through the operation and watched Mitsu s heart beat faster and faster because it was not strong enough and had to work so hard to push her blood into the arteries and veins He saw the clamp bite and tear through the aorta and heard the last sigh wrenched from the arching body which fell back and remained still

Well he said that s tough work for a woman Thea I think you ve had enough of that

But she went on She told him about Sirbu and the horror in his dark eyes and the way he had shot up stricken when Taikkes had torn off his gloves and said C rdiac arrest and walked out of the room Because although she was not there she had been told about it. And the tortured expression on his face when at last he had helped cover the body And she told him that Sirbu had disappeared

Bah, he said patting her knee reassuringly He ll get over it They all do And if he can t take it it s best he should find out about it now Why worry bout him Thea? What s done is done Stop thinking about your work when you leave the hospital It s not efficient If we all did that——

But it hurts Herb she said How can I forget when it s happened to me?

He threw the car into gear Let s go home he said I can make you forget a whole lot. Will you listen to me now Thea now that you ve got the whole gruesome mess out of your system?

That gruesome mess Mitsu!

I am sorry she said I shouldn t have let my hair down like this A docto should know when to hold her tongue

Good bye she said when they w re in the lobby of her apartment house Good bye, Herb Thank you for a lovely evening

He did not take the hand which was stretched out to him No he said not like this Thea Thea remember you promised—

Did I? she said I don t remember I don t think so I am an [illegible] forced herself to [illegible] when you come [illegible] nk.

17

OUTSIDE the day was as usual Like yesterday had been like any other day in February in New York Cold windy in spots and grey A day like other days and he Nick Sarbu walking f st down the street as though he was going somewhere as though he was a guy l k n h ~ L
job
from
talking about ordinary things about the people upstairs making that racket late at night and it not even being Saturday and his sister s child using her left hand instead of the right and should she be made to change or not and the corruption in the police force and was Gross murderer going to be picked up or wasn t he?

Yah the day was like other days all right but he wasn t like other guys any more He was the guy v ho had killed a woman right there in the operating room in f ont of God and everybody and he could walk as far as he wanted to from the hospital and as fast s his legs would carry him without running so that people would turn around and look at him and know him for vhat he was he but couldn t change th t He had killed a woman

He tried to remember how it had happened at wh t time he had ceased to be the right kind of a guy and become the mur derer at what point he had failed in his duties and he couldn t remember There was a long blank or was it a long blank eally or a short one stretched out into elastic eternity by the enormity of what had taken place? between the moment when he had looked up at the bottle with the transfusion running as it should down the clear ~l ~ h r – L J
no name that
and the time v

turned in horror and saw the bottle empty except for the blood foam sticking to its side How could he force those minutes back into memory and know the extent of his guilt? Because the know ledge was there if he could only squeeze it out whether it had been five minutes earlier—and then he would really deserve that electric chair just as surely as Moretti deserved it for pulling the trigger on the three kids—or whether it had just finished draining Then his guilt would be counted out in seconds really the fraction of time it takes for the atlas to swivel on the axis for the neck to turn around for the voice to rise from the lung balanced on its column of air and cry out to the nurse Blood please The transfusion is running out And that was all Three heart beats no more A delayed reaction or a crass ignoble negligence the kind of negligence that for the patient had meant death?

Taikkes of course believed it was negligence He had said so But what Taikkes thought or Taikkes said didn t matter a dam He didn t care a hoot what anyone thought no not even Petra. Yeah it had to be your patient Petra Oh Petra why why did it have to be yours! Damn it to hell why did it have to be yours! It doesn t matter I ll never go back there I ll never have to see her again I m out Nobody can force me to go back. All right So I tried So I did make good studies and I did get my M D but it doesn t mean a thing that has nothing to do with it The only thing that matters is when you ve got a patient what do you do about it

ming and

etra

was

surprised to hear me say it I guess I spoke before I thought. But I didn t want her I didn t want her near me then I knew I couldn t think if I felt her near me I just asked her to get out and she left. She was mad and she left And that was good It didn t matter if she was made or not. The only thing that mattered was Mitsu. And I watched Mitsu

Dead It happened so quickly What happened? How did it happen? What happened on the table? The blood pressure was low but it was low to begin with and I was watching it The lungs were going up and coming down They said that was all right I was doing

it too fast to begin with but then I slowed down I slowed down and it was all right The heart was okay and then all at once there was nothing Nothing at all And Taikkes came in and looked at the bottle And it had run dry But when had I looked up last? I was pumping the lung and watching the electrocardiogram and the blood pressure and the anaesthetic and the blood and I didn t stop I was watching all the time I wasn t thinking about anything else I was not thinking about Petra

Was I thinking about Petra? Mitsu tell me do you know? Tell me If I was I want to know I don t care a damn what she thinks what Taikkes thinks what anybody things t all I want to know did I kill you? Did I kill you Mitsu? I had my hand on your face I had my f nger on your pulse Your face was warm There in the palm of my hand it was alive Sleeping Alive and sleeping trusting me And then there was nothing under my finger I felt nothing They started the blood again and Taikkes brought in the electric plates and you bounced out f om under my hands and I scr tched your face I felt it I felt my nail scr tch your face when you were jerked off from under my h nd They made you bounce and bounce like a decapitated frog but it didn t mean anything You were dead You weren t you any more It w s all over

You ve been dead two hours

You ve been dead five hours

Listen buddy where d you think you re going? Yeah I mean you Come on over I ve been watching you since I got on this beat. It s the fifth time I seen you cross the streets against the lights and maybe I missed a few with the traffic and all You going any place in particular? Taking walk eh? Now look beat it Go on home I don t want to see you again. Gives me the creeps with the five o clock traffic coming Hear me? That s right. Beat it Go home.

Because there was no place to go any more Home wasn t the place to go to now She d know Quick as a flash she d know what had gone wrong She was from the old country and as soon as she put her eyes on him she d know her son had killed patient. Four feet ten she w s and big as a minute but you didn t fool her very long The X ray eye she had the clinical eye all right. She knew

what was the matter with people almost before it happened. Whatever taste or talent for medicine he had, he got it from her. Joe Petrosini when he broke his elbow he couldn t take the physiotherapy at the hospital any more and when Mom exercised and massaged his arm he got well again he got to use it much faster than the doctor thought he could. And she knew that Maria couldn t keep her baby two weeks before she aborted And she d know her son had killed a patient no matter what story he d be able to tell her If he could tell any story at all. Because you just can t go home and tell a woman who s brought up five children all by herself and works herself to the bone and paid for eight years of school—yeah sure he worked but she worked harder—and made her son a doctor something to be proud of and looked up to that that was what it amounted to a mushy brained weakling who ll let a patient die on the table because he didn t take his job seriously

Dream of love eh? Dream of women and what you would do if you had her in your arms? And was it not a real woman there not in the game of love but in the supreme moment when life and death balanced and that s the time you chose to say Excuse me, please I want to think about something else. I am wondering time out please what it would feel like to have Petra in my arms

But I didn t think about Petra

So what the hell were you thinking about? Where were you? Why don t you know what happened?

And how do you think you can ever face her again?

Hornsby was nice Hornsby was a hell of a swell fellow about it He did it all practically by himself All you had to do was to push the cart and when you were down in the morgue he lifted it by himself and put it in the drawer of the icebox wrapped up in its sheet and all you had to do was to write the label checking for the spelling on the chart which was on the cart and stick the label in the slot of the icebox drawer And leave it there alone And he talked of something else while you were washing at the sink and changing clothes later upstairs Then he said something about going down and eating and he wanted you to go and eat with him at the residents table but you couldn t eat then and

went out. Too damned sensitive to go down to dinner after all that had happened. And too damn sensitive to watch the job and [illegible]

You don t want any part of it any more Not that kind of thing Never again neve ragain never never never again feel that pulse die feel the head wrenched away from you feel the live-dead skin under your nails There s the army there s always the army You can get into the army no not as a medic As a soldier

Kill again me? Take a rifle and shoot a guy me? Well at least that s cleaner You never promise the Chinks to bring them back alive! Is there nothing for me but to go around killing people? Is that what I am meant for? After killing her do I have to kill her brothers? Dope she s not Chinese she s a Jap

That s swell that makes it right. Thanks Nick. Good boy Nick. Go on and kill the Chinks N ck. That ll make it one hundred per cent

Yeah, and gets you medals too and makes a hero out of you

And never see her again

As if I wanted to

I ll have a bowl of soup

Another bowl of soup please

Yeah it sure is getting colder

Yeah, I guess that s right. And a cup of coffee please No black.

Yeah I guess I ll have a sandwich Yeah ham will be fine.

No I m not waiting for anybody Where s the washroom?

'Yeah I guess the days are getting longer

No there s nothing wrong with the sandwich. I just am not hungry I guess

Is that so? Your brothe in law? Twenty pounds he lost? In how long? I see Ought to see a doctor

Yeah I know they charge a lot b t it might be serious

I don t know about that but it might be Well suppose it was

they cure them if it s early enough. If they have a decent anaesthetist you mean

Another cup of coffee please

Yeah, I guess I am. Okay check please No I m not doing anything tonight I m not going to either

Well so long

So where are you going now Nick? You got to make up your mind Not home No not home And not to the hospital either With all of them looking at you. It ought to be over now They must have finished the autopsy They must have the results. They must know

I d like to know

I could call up I could ask Sandstrom or Hornsby He looked at me like he was sorry for me The hell with him He d be sorry if it was him Would it have happened to him? Did it ever happen to anyone else?

What did happen?

Stull would know I m not going to ask him!

Taikkes would know

Sandstrom would know Hornsby would know

Petra would know

Petra

Pack of Camels please Where s your phone book?

Sigmond 8-9843

Dr Petrie please?

I see No no message

Petra—Petra—Petra——

No off

with the French poodle will you give him a message? Just two words will you? Just tell him to go climb a tree I am tired of waiting around Tell him Nick has croaked and he can go and climb a tree Thanks officer I sure am much obliged

She s been dead eight hours

Sigmond 8-9843

Dr Petrie please No no message

I guess that s the only thing to do I guess that s the only place to go I guess that you don t have to kill when you get in the army I guess you can get killed instead You can get yours instead of somebody else getting his and that evens it up then The first time something risky comes up you can go and do it And that evens it up I guess Mom wouldn t like it but that has nothing to do with it It s me It s my life and I can do what I want with it Even throw it away

That s a suicidal tendency Look out Nick.

That s not a suicidal tendency If somebody s got to be killed it might as well be me Because it s my fault And I can t stand it I can t absolutely stand it I absolutely can t stand it

My feet are absolutely frozen I can t feel them any more I can t move them any more

Sigmond 8–9843

—No no message

I ll sit down here for a while Get a cup of coffee and sit down

If I sit down I ll never be able to get up again

I ll go out there She ll have to be b ck some time tonight I ll go and talk to her J st once more Just ask her what the report was Just look at her once more And if I did it——

18

[illegible]

remembered the character in the corner the young drunk who did not smell of booze

Hey you! she said then louder Hey you!

Nick opened his eyes and came to the desk.

That was her said the Dragon with a toss of her head in the direction Petra had taken The head was grey misshapen by tight curls adorned by greying eyebrows the folds of loose skin over the lids cut her eyes in two and the grey pearl choker made a dent where her neck should have been But the eyes were blue and not so very long ago she had been beautiful and men had called her darling Didn t you know her when she went by?

I was asleep said Nick Did she come in? He started towards the elevator

Not so fast said the Dragon I ll find out if she wants to see you first.

She plugged in the call by feel her eyes still on the man You don t even know where she s at she said to him. You go on and sit right down and waited till he was out of earshot before flipping the lever

Dr Petrie she said there s a man here to see you He s been hanging around for the last hour and a half

Who is it? asked Petra

He says he is a doctor the Dragon went on but he sure don t look like one Hey she called to Nick what did you say your name was?

Nicholas Sirbu said Nick Dr Sirbu.

Dr Sturbu ʟ ɴ ı know him? You sure?

She closed th She says she knows you ııı7

Nick stood up again his knees suddenly disarticulated unattached He entered the elevator rubbed his hand across his chin and then shrugging his shoulders pressed the starter

Petra at home in pretty bright clothes against the background of low furniture and pale draperies Petra at the door with a pleasant I-am-the-hostess smile asking him to come in was suddenly a stranger Nick stood one moment at the door unable to say anything unable to blend this woman and the woman he knew the woman in the white coat with the plain unpainted face He sought quickly some clue by which he might recognize his love The eyes —but the eyes were different shiny as in excitement as in anger the mouth—but the mouth was smiling a painted smile the hai — but the blonde hair was soft and curly not pulled back hard as she wore it at the hospital *Petra* he thought *where re you?*

Are you coming in she asked or do I have to bring a chair to the hall? She was smiling still but the impatience was real

I am sorry he said It s so late——

Where have you been all day? she said while he forced his feet one after the other into her apartment on the rug and across the room and all the way through it until he had reached the window as far from her as possible He turned at last and faced her I have tried all day to reach you and no one knew where you were she said

You called me? he asked Why?

Because I wanted to speak to you she said Here N ck s t down Give me your coat

He handed her his co t p otesting he would not stay long that ʟ

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You had nothing to do with it she said again. That s what he said and since I can t imagine the big white father saying so to you I thought I would

But—maybe he was right Maybe I was at fault said Nick, not believing her yet pushing back the great surge of relief that was rising within him You see I don t remember what happened exactly When I last looked up——

I don t care what you remember and what you forgot, said Petra Maybe it would matter another time but this girl couldn t survive no matter what you or anyone else had done So will you please try to act sensible and grown up about it?

But she is dead cried Nick and if it wasn t my fault—thank God oh thank God for that anyway—then what the hell were we all doing there disembowelling her cutting her in two as though she was a damned rabbit or something?

Stop it Nick said Petra white to the lips now and really angry You have no right——

But he could not stop There were five of us there he said. Hornsby who looked on and said nothing just helped along in the butchery and Stull fiddling away with the woman s aorta and bursting it like a balloon no not like a balloon it was made of macaroni like cooked macaroni that s what he said. And Sandstrom who had to be excused he had to see a man about a dog, and Taikkes who couldn t be bothered to get there in time and me And you said it wasn t my fault Well that s nice to know What I d like to ask is whose fault was it then? Because she was alive when she came into the operating room you know I put her to sleep you know And I carted her downstairs and put her in the icebox—afterwards

Are you quite through? asked Petra her voice shaking

No said Nick and then stopped

Because I was there too continued Petra It was I who sent her to Taikkes I was a member of the team don t forget.

Nick caught his breath his anger still pounding inside him, his blood rushing in his ears because the woman who was standin before him had now reached back through the day and looked like his Petra again Her perfume and her voice and her face moved

nto the passionate image which he carried within him. Yet loving ier he had to go on spurred by his desire.

Yes you were there he said. You didn t do anything but ou were there But tonight where were you? How could you o on and amuse yourself with a date and have a good time when Mitsu—

Her expression did not change she did not move She remained ilent after his voice had died. But her immobility her silence were o charged so vehement that Nick was shaken He stood up

Forgive me he said. I don t know what seized me I am crazy lease forget it.

Get out she said.

Please he said I had no right to say anything I have hurt ou I didn t mean what I said

Get out She turned away from him in a short gesture and sat down taut and straight

Look, he said I am a louse I know I could kick myself You vere kind enough——

Will you please get out? she said

Oh damn he said All right I ll go

He walked to the hall where she had placed his coat and took it awkwardly jamming his arms into the torn lining of the sleeves He hesitated and the tension of her face told him she was waiting or him to go in order to burst into tears He ached with remorse

He came back to her Petra he said and each separate word hurt as though it were wrenched out of his flesh as he spoke Petra don t let me go like this I can t stand it. I am in pain

She forced herself to smile Let s put an end to this she said without moving her head her voice hard You are upset and I believe I am a little upset too Let s not become hysterical about it. Please go

I love you Petra

Do you? she said That s nice Good night.

Don t you believe me?

Yes she cried and rose violently pushing her chair against the wall Yes I do and no I don t and who cares anyway! Go away Nick will you? Go away and leave me alone. I ve had enough.

I ve had enough she thought enough of this one and of the others of Herb and his needs of Taikkes who can t sleep alone and of Surbu now A little psychotherapy for Surbu Doctor a little sex therapy for Surbu who has to have a woman.

I ve had enough she cried I want to take my bath. I want to go to bed I want to be me just me alone

She pushed him away from her both hands against his chest, against the contracted spasmodic throat against the young neck with its stupid twisted and flashy tie

Go and get yourself a woman she cried. Go on the streets are full of them Down the street and into the taverns Go on, leave me alone!

Her hands were against his chest and the warmth of his chest was against the now open fists against the open palms She grew afraid of his warmth and closed her fingers against him and while she was pushing him and shaking him he was speaking her name like a prayer like an invocation and a litany Petra, Petra, Petra——

And her hands knew compassion before she felt it in her heart. Her hands opened again straightened the tie and pulled down the rumpled lapels of the coat and patted the hard harsh stubble of his cheek

He was backing away from her now backing away from the pity he did not want from the compassion of the hands which sought and repulsed him He tried hard to cover the shamed nakedness of his face to rearrange his face into the face of a man who has made a dreadful error but who can smile about it and seem jaunty and nonchalant Only what she saw was the naive foolish grimace the working jaws chewing his shame the tortured black eyes and the wounded humble mouth down-drawn in sorrow

She lifted her arms again but he had turned away without seeing her stumbling out and getting mixed up among the closet doors And so it was she who had to stop him to force him back to her to force his head down to hers And then their mouths met in equal passion in equal fury of anger and desire He and she no more only the striking heart the breath withheld the anonymous blackness

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BY FOUR o clock in the afternoon the slow dragged-out day was almost finished Dido was up again having slept having shed the unnecessary sorrow—unnecessary since the woman was dead and could suffer no more—and she was eager and fresh again. Now came the time for which the day had been endured the time when she could stop pretending and start living because sweet or harsh, angry or aloof Dave was to be home was to be hers

Daytime was when nothing happened When nothing happened in the life of a wife just as well as in the life of a show girl Or else the things that happened were dreary Rehearsal routines or household routines It all amounted to just this waiting for the man the good customer the lover to be or now as it happened, the husband

There had been two phone calls during the afternoon One from the hospital from a woman the nurse probably a Miss something-or-other a flowery name asking how she was— Are you all right, Mrs Stull? Has that stomach upset straightened out—and was the Doctor in? No the Doctor was at the office she could call him there and the number was—— No she had the number thank you very much The voice was polite maternal and competent. The voice was fat and creaked in the heavy corset. It was a voice that went to bed at nine o clock sharp The other phone call was from Nome He wanted to come for her or for her to meet him. He had just found a hell of a swell place off Broadway where you went down a flight of stairs They made pizzas huge smelly pizzas with anchovy and bubbly cheese and the drinks weren t bad and he had met a couple of swell fellows and how about joining him and going down there

What about Hermana? said Dido Is she down there with ou?

You know damn well she isn t he said. He was giving her he absent treatment but he missed her and was willing to be con oled

No she said she didn t console on Fridays She consoled only on Mondays and Thursdays That was all Besides Hermana was her friend

You little bitch he said And she laughed She had laughed oo fast, an unguarded happy laughter because he was still kick ng about the morning and because it made her feel young again o have him call her that But she wasn t one of the kids any more he was married to Dave and she shouldn t have laughed So she hung up fast cutting her laugh in two

He was giving Hermana the absent treatment was he? And Her mana had quit her job while he w s in town just for his sake Maybe she d lost it They didn t like that kind of unscheduled vacation at the Blitz. And he was going to be in town for only one week anyway She dialled

Hermana she said do you know of a little place off Broadway where you go down a flight of stairs and there s a bar and they make pizzas?

Off Broadway? said Hermana. Yes that s the Gallery a gyp-joint. Why?

I think that s where you ll find Nome said Dido He just called He said he was giving you the absent treatment for a while but he missed you and didn t know what to do with himself

That ll be the day said Hermana when he doesn t know what to do with himself Okay kid thanks for the tip I m on my way and it ll be strictly murder

Good luck, said Dido wishing she could be in at the kill. But that would spoil it all and anyway she would hear all the gory details in good time

Hermana might as well marry him she thought She s been in the game too long It wea s you down afte eight years Pretty soon you re too high-strung too irritable The e s nothing left then but to get on the list or else start selling lingerie Or perfumes Or

demonstrate nail polish kits And try sleeping at night when you v slept by day With Nome of course it would be different. Alaska for a couple of years then a house in the suburbs with three kids and a show in town on Saturday nights Hermana getting fat, sitting down at a table watching the other poor saps doing their stuff For her

I hope so she thought and yawning looked at the clock. She hadn t got her dress yet and soon the shops would be closed. I'll try Saks she thought all my myself I ll show those damned salesgirls I can be twice as bitchy as they are.

You little bitch Nome had said And the words felt good to hear Because No thank you it wasn t true any more.

And now it was after five o clock and she put on her new dress and liked herself in it It was a sheath of green velvet sleeveless, very dark which made her skin quite pale and her hair almost raven black It had pleats in the waist that in time could be let out She put on vivid lipstick a heavy gold bracelet gold earrings and her low sandals The earrings were too much and she took them off I look like a slave girl she thought That s good enough. I don t want to look like the favourite slave Because maybe I m not.

She went to the phone and ordered groceries to be sent up from the commissary in the building Then she lay down and waited. And while she waited she felt the ghost of Mitsu come back.

She did not come back in sorrow or in anger She simply laid herself down beside Dido Shoulder against shoulder slender thigh against slender thigh hands equally joined on quiet breasts—only Mitsu was quieter—and eyes equally sightless under the gently lowered lids

Look Mitsu said Dido mutely look how easy it is Nothing to hurt you nothing to scare you Nothing bad can ever happen again. No man will ever beat you again nor steal your money nor leave you after making love to you nor scold you because you re only you and not somebody else Nobody will make fun of you nobody will laugh at you behind your back or right out in your face nobody will make you feel cheap All of that is over for you but for me it still goes on and hurts

But what about the kids?

But your kids are out of you You ve made them and they re alive Somebody thought enough of you to let you have his child You were all right, he didn t mind But me if I were to die it would be as if I hadn t been I d be dead altogether All they d ever remember s that they had fun with me And even that Dave would forget.

Dave——

Don t be mad at Dave Dido begged still not moving the folds of her dress nicely arranged so it wouldn t muss he did his best He couldn t have done better Not because of you He didn t care about you little sister any more than he cares about me but because of him of his pride He needs my love because nobody loves him He wanted you to live to make his work good And now you have defeated him Now he has been beaten before everybody who counts for him befo e his chief and befo e his interns and how is he going to take that he who has never lost before? If he were to kick *me out tomorrow* I would die maybe but my pride would *not* hurt very much because I didn t grow up with pride But what will hold him up if his pride is broken up inside him? Please Mitsu if you can help him from where you are now help him Tell me how to help him I don t want him to be hurt before me See, I can t feel sorry for you any more because I am too sorry for him I brought you flowers yesterday and I ve cried for you and I was sick but now I can t feel sorry any more For you it was the last blow but for him it is the first and it is always the fi st one which counts——

There was the snap of the key in the lock and unexpectedly Dave was in She swung her feet off the sofa and sat up

For heaven s sake he said putting down his brief case and sliding out of his overcoat what are you doing there Dido stretched out like a corpse?

I was lying do vn she said catching fo ty winks She went to him Kiss me Dave she said

His hand rumpled her hair Don t you ever do anything besides sleep? he said Is that all you do all day long?

I went out and shopped a bit I bo ght a dress

That s tops he said. That s exercise that s constructive. Is that *the thing that you have on?*

Yes she said. I got it at Saks Do you like it?

What the hell do you want me to say? he said. If you got it at Saks and paid good money for it I suppose it s a dress It looks kind of baggy to me. Aren t you doing something about dinner?

Yes she said I ve ordered some stuff to be sent up But it hasn t come yet It s so early Dave It isn t six o clock yet. How come you are home so early?

He was kneeling before the grate lighting a fire, then he tuned in the radio carefully getting just the right balance of sound. He took up his pipe and lighting it sat down stretching his legs before him He didn t seem to take his time about answering but he answered in his usual voice poised unhurried without anger

I ll tell you he said and then let s forget about what you ordered and go out and eat I am starved. I haven t even had lunch today

After a moment he continued That woman I told you about last night died on the table this morning There was nothing worth operating on Her arteries weren t even worth trying But I tried. I knew it couldn t work the moment I put the clamp in but by then it was too late Taikkes came in just then and did the usual things but he gave up after a while There was absolutely nothin worth doing Even if he could resuscitate her she would die again

ou know

on his pipe 'That s the way it was Of course it s a great nuisance to have somebody die in the operating room If the patient dies in his room, well, that s his temporary domicile the one he entered for the time being The doctor can sign the death certificate and that s that. But in the operating room or anywhere else in the hospital that s different That s a coroner s case The county coroner has to be called in with the body left intact He has to perform the examination ascertain the cause of death——

But so what? he cried standing up and kicking the footstool that got in his way So what? Should I spare the hospital that nuisance and not give the patient his chance to live? Should I

reserve the statistics for Taikkes and to hell with that woman and er heart? Was that what he wanted me to do?

What happened? said Dido quietly watching her husband alk up and down the room and turn again talking not as to her ut as to a jury which to her was invisible. Did they make a stink bout it?

I wish you wouldn t use such crude expressions Dido said Dave with an expression of distaste on his face Not even at home ot even with me

She shrugged it off impatiently Go on she said

He clicked off the radio Well it was in a sense a scene A very npleasant scene It was more than unpleasant it was——

[illegible]

t any rate but it was perfectly useless as we all knew he as well s the rest of us

The e was a knock at the door and he stopped suddenly his lance questioning her

The delivery boy she said.

He got up and opened the door The Negro boy crossed the all into the kitchen put the carton upon the table and on his vay out gave a look of curiosity around the room and grinned t her

Thanks Jimmy she said

Dave closed the door heavily upon the boy His f ce was dark vhen he returned to her

I would have given him a tip she said They expect it

Look, he said. When these damn niggers deliver stuff here ull yourself together Don t sprawl around don t smile and be-riend them They take advantage of it

Oh Dave she said how can he take advantage of me! He is a nice kid and besides he s got a million dollar trick. He can look at the end of his nose with the right eye and make the other turn

around like a windmill He ought to go on TV with that and I told him so

Dave swallowed hard. I don t want you to enter into conversation with the delivery boy he said. I don t want you to talk to him about getting on TV I don t——

Dave she said I promise you he ll never get fresh with me

Look, he said you cannot promise something is not going to happen You can only guarantee it won t

All right she said exasperated I guarantee it won t. Now will you please forget the course in English grammar and go on with Taikkes

I m hungry he said I ll drink some milk.

She remained sitting while he poured himself a glass of milk, downed it in three gulps and poured a second glass which he brought with him and placed on the coffee table

All right he said I ll go on He sat down I don t know why I am telling you all this he said It won t make sense to you anyway

She said nothing

I ll tell you this much he went on. I have honestly tried to understand the man I have done what I could for him. I ve done more than my share lately far more than is expected of a junior associate I have seen his patients covered his postoperative follow ups done rounds for him alibied for him day and night for the last few months and kept up his practice

I can t think of anyone who would be that honest about it. I could have opened an office on the ninth floor and I d have all of his practice by now I don t think he d even care But I am not like that I admired the man—I respected him. Crazy though he is I respected his sorrow

And this woman was my case understand He was to come in, as he did but the case was for me I wanted it and I had to have it. If he didn t trust me in the first place, he should have said so. Or been there when I started.

Dave she cried exasperated you don t tell me anything I want to know What happened in the operating room?

Vhat s he mad about anyway? Was it your fault she died is hat it?

No said Dave it wasn t Of course not He relighted his ipe and remained with it in his hand suspended in mid air while iis brow wrinkled.

I ve tried to think it out he said and I can t I think the thing e holds against me is that I don t care Well that much is true I an t say I cared one way or the other about the Watanabe woman didn t know her and her life or death leaves me absolutely in lifferent Wait a minute don t go into shock, I am trying to tell

I suppose so said Dave I can t help it I am not a hypocrite und I am not going to pretend I did not become a surgeon in order o save the lives of my brothers because I love them all—in block. chose to become a surgeon because it is a category of problems hat are more exciting for me to solve than anything else in the vorld. *As a surgeon I d give ten years of my life to have succeeded* his morning to have done a good job to have that patient number 1186 in bed right now and recovering

As a surgeon said Dido then stopped

And the upshot of the whole thing is a damned nuisance said Dave Taikkes made himself very unpleasant about it I offered to resign I had to there was no choice And he accepted very casu lly As though that didn t matter to him one way or the other As though he was able to carry the load by himself

What do you mean? said Dido How resign?

Clear out of the office said Dave And I presume he will do his best to have me off the hospital surgical staff That said Dave getting up and p cing through the room is what I don t like He can hurt me He is the chief of staff after all and what he says goes Well there are other hospitals where I could practice it goes with out saying but he is big man It might be damned difficult to get on a good hospital list I tell you D do it is a damned nuisance

That said Dido is funny

Really? said Dave. It strikes your funny bone?

Yes said Dido it does

Would you mind explaining how my losing my position in the office and on the staff could be amusing to you? It means most of my income you know

I can t help it said Dido Inside me I die laughing

I am listening said Dave standing before her and when you are through laughing perhaps you ll throw on your coat so we can go out and eat I guess it is useless trying to talk to you except about clothes food or the show business

Sit down said Dido and tell me how the show business is different from the business you are engaged in?

I am sorry said Dave but you ll have to find an easier one for me I cannot compare the sea and a mud puddle

Dave said Dido please sit down.

He had his funny look on his face his look of cynical, amused contempt His mouth smiled but his eyes hated and despised her and condemned in advance everything she was going to say and everything she was Why did you marry me Dave she asked.

He sat down and crossing his ankles relaxed on the sofa pillows behind him I wanted you he said and the mediocrity of a cheap affair appalled me You were a—— he hesitated a little, seeking obviously to rephrase his thought and then gave up you were a swell mistress he said Why not keep you as my wife

I am not your wife she said dully Putting a ring on my finger did not make me one nor the marriage certificate, nor the justice of the peace nor the name on the mailbox downstairs You did not make me your wife You don t even love me

I do he said lightly touching her wrist with his hand Foolish though you are I love you Dido

You don t know me she said

Ah, he said the misunderstood woman No Dido you are my wife You belong to the great sisterhood of the misunderstood wives The fact that you can say these things is worth a marriage certificate in any language

What do you know about me? she said. What do you know about the girl you have married?

Do you really want me to play this game in earnest? he said. I am hungry and I d like to eat

She held her breath one moment. All right, she said let s go

No he said, you have something on your mind Out with it, let s get it over with.

Do you think a show girl s life is a string of parties and dates and presents and men?

Oh, Hell he said I try not to think of it Dido I guess it has its miserable aspects Not the show girl alone I suppose That sort of thing applies to all women who do not have a husband. That sort of thing or else what a French psychologist calls the melan choly of virgins I don t know which is the danker for a man to think about Some women just take it for granted I suppose So what? It does not need to affect their entire life

I don t know about the melancholy of virgins said Dido I wasn t a virgin long enough to find out about it

This said Dave has been a charming day It promises to end in even a better manner

Yes said Dido Do you know how I got my first job?

In the usual fashion I suppose said Dave his face a mask carved of stone

No said Dido That didn t happen until later It was in a vaudeville act at the Palace Rialto The e was a very funny comedy about a girl entertaining her boy friend and th kid sister snooping around and spoiling things for her So at the end of the act the b at gets caught and spanked in public The brat w s me

Charming said Dave

I got thirty five a week for it Twice day and three times on Sundays

Good money said D ve Ho v long did you keep it up?

I was good said Dido I had a b g voice nd I f ught and squealed like mad A real piercing voice too It lasted fiv months

bit of singing

hough nd w

Why are you telling me these things said Dave To cheer me up? To prove to me in your little girl way that I am not the only one who makes mistakes? That I shouldn t take too seriously what Taikkes thinks or does that I must be brave and tomorrow is another day? No wait he said seeing Dido draw away from him and reaching the far end of the sofa turn to him anger contracting her mouth and bringing her jaws together in an animal snarl wait, he said you ve got to understand since you asked. What happens to the disorganized neurotic half virgins on the prowl is bound to be sordid No he cried you didn t have to be spanked for the moronic laughter of a crowd of half wits You didn t have to make thirty five a week that way You could have worked at the five-and ten you could have wrapped packages in a store basement you could have gone to work as a dishwasher or as a nursemaid Other girls do What you did you did because it was fun and you liked it and you need not come to me slobbering about it I don t want your past I am not interested in it It s over and done with I don t want to hear about it understand

Dido was breathing hard sobbing without sound She tried to speak but could not She bit her lips and tightened herself to regain control of her voice

Come he said stretching his arm and taking her hand pulling her to him in spite of her resistance don t make a scene about it. It s over I tell you it won t happen again You won t have to solve that kind of problem again You were just a kid anyway You re only twenty-one you are only starting to live

But that was me she said That kid she hasn t died I carry her with me I haven t changed I am her——

No you are not he said You are my wife You don t have to hand out your phone number every time some bar fly whistles at you

Dido wrenched her arm away from him and started to laugh as she had sobbed without sound her chest heaving with long in drawn breaths that had to be forced out before they broke

But I did she said I did today He whistled and I gave him my name and phone number and——

She tried to say more but the suffocating torrent broke through

the tightened throat and covered her voice She felt the man beside her rise violently and call her a name she had not known on his lips She felt herself picked up fighting blindly with tight lids She felt the sting of a slap on her face And then she was thrown back on the couch her head hitting the wall and striking dully in her ears There was another sound more distant of the door Then she was alone with the sound of her own scream

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GARTH HAD first entered the Superior s study five months ago the day before his admission to the novitiate It had been an early autumn day The window was open and penetrating smells came in from the garden the odour of the earth soaked through by recent rain of autumnal foliage and wet bark all the ferments, pungent and sweet of the rich indolent grounds steaming in the midday warmth as in a second flowering or a second harvest Today the window was closed the sky heavy and the garden bared of its leaves laid pruned harsh and pure in the skeletal austerity of winter quiet Like me thought Garth Rid of all that doesn t matter Pared to the bone at last A tree without branches A single shaft

You ve called me Father?

The Superior gestured Sit down he said his French consonants ringing in the quiet cell and when Garth obeyed Are you happy here Garth?

Garth looked up in surprise at the unaccustomed name and at the question He sought its meaning on the older monk s face But Father Thomas wide peasant face was impassive and his eyes brimming with light and full held no clue

Yes said Garth I am happy There was a silence. Very happy Garth repeated

You have been a novice five months said Father Thomas Counting the period you spent here as a guest and as a postulant you ve been here almost a year now

Yes said Garth

Do you feel that you have grown?

I am growing said Garth Something is growing in me. A sense of peace and force I had not known before

The Superior shrugged a little and a smile briefly illuminated the heavy features You have not scattered your activities he said This growing force can be achieved in the world also if a man lives in *purity and in singleness of purpose*

There is more than that said Garth There is joy

The Superior raised his head sharply Ah he said there is joy today?

The sharp lift of his voice warned Garth that he had said the wrong thing that his answer was not welcome He had no choice though, nor any intention to dissemble The elation he had felt during the hour of meditation following Johnston s departure was still full within him It could not be denied

Especially today he said with involuntary pride

You saw your father this morning said the Superior

Yes said Garth. He cleared his throat That was painful he said. At first

It had been difficult to speak to Johnston It was more difficult to speak to Father Thomas Yet the Superior and he were more of the same language now than he who had been a surgeon and the psychiatrist were Why was that? he asked himself turning away *from the monk s searching blue eyes Was it because Johnston was* passing no judgment and Father Thomas had the right to condemn or was it because of some compelling power in this man which interfered with his own thoughts and forced him into a direction which this time he could not escape?

The joy had been abundant overwhelming A gift renewed like the first answer to his quest months ago a rededication Once again, having given up all all again was wrenched away from him and he had stood rejected berated, flagellated by human sorro v while the tides of divine compassion had divided around him merciful all healing

I mean he said after a moment of thought that the tumult the empty noise the passion that my father brought to me the disorder of his emotions contrasted so violently with what I have found here the richness of our life its depth its order its placidity —I cannot express it. I wept after my father left me I think it was in gratefulness

Father Thomas leaned forward on his desk his eyes far away and his voice pensive The French accent that thirty five years in America had not succeeded in erasing emphasized oddly the familiar words

At that time Jesus spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves as being just and despised others Two men went up to the temple to pray the one was a Pharisee and the other a publican The Pharisee stood and began to pray thus within himself O God thank thee that I am not like the rest of men robbers dishonest adulterers or even like this publican I fast twice a week. I pay tithes of all I possess But the publican standing afar off would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven but kept striking his breast saying O God be merciful to me a sinner I tell you, Father Thomas voice rose condemningly this man went to his home justified rather than the other for every one that exalts himself shall be humbled and he that humbles himself shall be exalted

Garth did not reply

You saw your father—— Father Thomas spoke again

Is it ignoble to be thankful for grace?

No said Father Thomas heavily not for grace

Garth took a deep breath The elation which he had felt earlier was ebbing away withdrawing There was some frightful mistake about this some misunderstanding Should he justify himself should he speak?

Father he said if I am guilty of vanity and pride——

You said you had grown said the Superior interrupting Can you tell me how?

As though I had been a prisoner all my life Without being even aware of it As though I had been starved allowed to go naked into a senseless battlefield into a nightmare——

My son said Father Thomas please speak simply

Garth felt his throat tighten He waited until he could trust his voice The Superior did not detach his piercing glance from Garth s face After a moment he tried again

I have had nothing of the things that count You know what I have been Here I found significance the promise of a life of thought.

Facts organized the treasures of faith given to me freely to explore

A brief flash moved the face of the priest then his face hardened again These are the little things the tidbits the by products of grace Garth, have you felt love?

I love God, said Garth

Do you know Him?

I am learning said Garth

No said the Superior I don t think you are

The blow was struck More than his words the Superior s voice was final rejecting A cold wave of anger grasped the novice against which he struggled He had not attempted to justify himself with his father earlier nor with the psychiatrist whose disapproval was evident to him Were there no words with which he could explain himself to this man? Was the truth inacceptable or could he not make it understood? This was important it was critical Father Thomas had to be reached

Do you understand why I am s ying this? said Father Thomas

Yes said Garth He rose went to the window and pressed his forehead to the icy pane The garden was dead under the sterile snow and of an intolerable whiteness

I don t believe it he said at last You are testing me You a e testing the strength of my vocation You a e going to ask me to return to my father You will do this as test You are not in earnest You cannot be

I am in earnest Garth said the Superior

After a pause he continued You were speaking of peace and of force of research and of erudition No do not protest Whether it be Greek or Hebrew or science o numbers the technique is the s me You had reached excellence in your path and that w ot good enough——

Father said Garth in neurosurgery there no excellence Only an app oximation——

Father Thoma aved the interruption as de

You had nothing more to study except techniques he said

but here, you felt was a technique which transcended the others Yes you were right in this It does transcend the others But the End of this technique is the Word the Word become flesh Who has dwelt amongst us You have not sought Him

Father—— Garth began and then the futility of the struggle swept over him and he stopped talking

I have spoken to Dr Johnston this morning continued Father Thomas relentlessly Because he was moved I was moved. You say you wept this morning Garth After you wept I suppose you felt cleansed of your duties to feel pain and your responsibilities ended for you They did not end They began. Go back to your father start living his life with him repay him for his labours and his love honour in him the image of God We do not want satisfied men here Garth we want fighting men Men for whom the monastery is not a place of peace and placid content but the place of utmost sacrifice of terrible struggle of awful abnegations You said you learned to see God You will not see Him with the blinkers of smug book knowledge You will see Him face to face only in the fullness of your death to yourself in a life governed by sacrifice

I cannot go back said Garth

Offer your father your physical presence and your happiness Yes my son your happiness

Do you know what this would consist of asked Garth, his mouth dry with anger

You are not a child to be married off without your consent. No doubt Dr Taikkes will want you to meet some women perhaps even some fallen women to entice you into what he thinks is a normal life You should meet these women

I am appalled said Garth drily

The Superior laughed a laughter that sounded incongruous to Garth in the bareness of the cell

Are you afraid of temptations?

I have lived twenty nine years in complete darkness said Garth Nearly half of my life span Please he said his voice tightening think of all these lost years I don t want to offer God only the leftovers like the repentant Magdalenes who find favour with men no longer and turn to God!

God said the Supenor is more chantable than you are Do you feel now that if you are refused the habit you must abandon religion and live a sinner s life?

I have ceased thinking

That is wrong said the Supenor frowning Your life is not your own but it is up to you to decide how it should be lived Even in this I cannot order you to leave Garth Your vow of obedience is not binding in this If you think you must remain I will not send you from us

I am tired said Garth I cannot think.

He waited a moment then spoke again Do you feel he asked that it is wrong for me to be here?

Yes said Father Thomas Your motives are wrong Some day in the future you may be brought back to us by the right motive I believe it likely but not for the same reason

But what was the reason? said Garth.

Spiritual snobbishness said Father Thomas You felt that God was on this side of the tracks

Garth threw himself back on his chair Does it matter how or why I came? Supposing that you are right that I was in error as to what I sought that I deceived myself as well as you—does that mean that my vocation is false?

What d d you give up to follow Him Garth?

Garth did not answer

I shall tell you if you cannot said the monk You gave up nothing You gave up money that brought nothing you wanted you gave up a career in which you found no joy you gave up women in whom you took no pride you gave up a f ther towards whom you do not feel as a son Nothing he epeated with force not even the feel of life.

The phrase f ll into silence

Am I right?

Garth aised his eyes He felt nothing now except a profound f tigue His f ce his mouth were pale He f lt drained and exhausted. And the man cross th desk was staring at him with the f ll blue eyes of the vengeful angel

Yes he said you ar right.

Another parable crossed his mind the story of the uninvited guests who had come to the feast without the proper dress and who were seized and bound and thrown into the external darkness Where there are cries and tears and the gnashing of teeth O God O God, O God!

Father Thomas expected him to say something more to accept his decision to make plans He could not In the pause that followed he saw the older man blink and lose perhaps something of his assurance In a vague remote fashion he felt sorry for him. He almost wished he could help him deliver the blow that would cut himself out of the holy congregation He could not do that either He remained immobile unspeaking then his innate sense of the suitable of good breeding forced him to rise This situation should not be prolonged it was becoming unbearable for both of them. He had to leave he had to go back Go back to what? At the moment it did not matter It was only imperative to go How did one take leave of the Great Executioner? How did one properly take leave of one s life of one s own head on the block? Should he ask Father Thomas for his blessing should he shake his hand warmly but not too warmly and say that this had been a most interesting experience wonderful really and so provocative? Was one allowed to cry?

Do not go yet said the Superior There are many things we must still say to each other

I am extremely tired said Garth You must forgive me I must withdraw

Please sit down one moment more said the priest

A faint glow of hope rose in the total darkness I understood you properly said Garth. I should leave leave now?

Tomorrow said the Superior but not alone not in sorrow

Garth smiled

Why do you smile? said the Superior

At the moment said Garth I am not feeling sorrow I am too tired And too surprised I didn t think that Dr Johnston had that much eloquence He must have put on a very convincing speech. No I am not bitter I feel eviscerated You asked me what I had given up to follow God You said I had given up nothing You are

ri ht But it is because I had nothing to give Thus this belief in the reality of my vocation is the only thing that I have ever held with confidence with happiness And I must give this up now to follow not God but the world I do not understand I cannot even try And you must forgive me when I say that at the moment I do not care any more

Are you willing to do as I suggest? asked the priest the worried frown deepening on his brow

I have no choice said Garth

The Superior rose then from his desk came to Garth and traced over him the sign of the cross

Take heart my son he said Yo i have now taken the first step toward priesthood Kneel with me Garth and let us give thanks and praise God together for the sacrifice he has asked of you today

21

THE HARDEST had not been the silence the obedience the guardian ship upon his thoughts The hardest had been that constant gratu itous blindness the lowered eyes the non knowing of the people with whom he lived For Garth who instinctively disregarded the words he heard and sought instead meaning in men s faces the sacrifice of the eyes had been like an illness During the first few weeks it had almost defeated him but he had clung to the rule and in time became accustomed to it Thus he kept his eyes closed during the trip from the monastery to the city With the money the Superior had given him he paid the cab driver without look ing at him Now in the cold anger of the February wind he stood at the door of his own house and conscious at the same time of his loss and of his liberation he lifted his eyes at last. There barring the entrance interposing the fence of her long bones so meagrely covered with flesh that they were indecent to the sight was a maid he had not known before a dark hirsute heavy jawed woman whose age could not be guessed and whose eyes were glaucous and evil

The doctor is not in she said in a deep voice You cannot see the doctor here

One of Dad s cases thought Garth automatically seeking and finding the thick down of hair under the chin, the prominent orbital ridge one of the patients he won t let out of his sight An adrenal tumour case treated and watched and fed at the same time.

Aloud he said I am Dr Garth I ll come in.

She remained unmoving while he hesitated to push past her from fear of touching her wretchedness

I am his son

You ll have to wait

She turned then and the bass voice became a bird s dark cawing Umberto! she cried.

Garth put down his suitcase with a thrill of horror Is this what I have given up? O God how cruel is Your humour! At first I thought You were asking too much and this is what You were saving me from! And this is what You are now forcing back upon me From the house of the surging fountain into the cage of the screeching bird! From the inexhaustible fount into the dwelling of the crippled and the famished How long have I been away from this? Seven eight months—not quite a year This is February and it was then April. All the youth and the force of the year have been spent The whole lifetime of three seasons and the whole lifetime of my hope!

Umberto! the dark woman cawed again more piercingly and the voice of the butler answered I am coming What is it?

Garth approached the threshold Umberto he said I am glad to see you

He put out his hand to the old man Umberto had aged even more than his father The brown eyes had now the opacity of wood not yet completely sealed and no longer completely porous to daylight His skin flabbier than last year hung from the bridge of the high nose in sad longitudinal folds and the head cocked a little to one side in the f miliar attitude was shaking He stood thus for one moment squinting against the light then the deep ridges of his face opened up like a curtain joy rising to the old face and suffusing it with blood

Oh, Master Garth! Oh God be blessed oh God be blessed you have come back!

Yes I am back, Umberto said Garth moved by the man s emotion They asked me to return They told me I was needed here.

[illegible]

of the servant s ageing frame and at the same tin e the streng tl of his emotion His throat tightened

Come Umberto he said aren t you going to take me in Will you let me freeze in my spring coat outside my own home?

Umberto turned violently to the maid Take up his bag you stupid He wants to go up to his room don t you see? Make up his bed with the fine sheets Open the windows turn on the heat.

So saying he himself took the suitcase from Garth s hand and preceded him on the staircase his head still turned sideways as though afraid that the young man would deceive him and run away

We ve got a man in the house a house guest a doctor he said, but never mind he won t stay long He s leaving tonight. There s no need to worry

That doesn t matter Umberto said Garth. Where I was I had even forgotten about privacy

And did you sleep well there? asked Umberto pausing on the first landing his breath short but not relinquishing the suitcase. Did they give you a good bed a wide one the kind you want? Did they have spring mattresses for you or did you have to sleep— Oh I heard so many stories You look tired your eyes are tired. You don t look well Signorino you don t look well at all. What will the Doctor say?

But what am I thinking of he cried starting nervously up the stairs again I must call the Doctor tell him you re here Oh, how happy he will be! Oh how he has suffered and wept How badly he suffered when he lost you yes and wept wept before me! Oh Signorino don t do that to him again I am sorry I mustn t speak like that now It is over he will be happy You are here for good you are aren t you?

Yes said Garth I have come back for good But we mustn t call my father now Umberto He is at work It would disturb him

Disturb him! He would give the rest of his life to be disturbed like that cried Umberto But you are right he mustn t be disturbed and you must wash and look well I ll draw your bath, I ll get your good warm winter suit Look at you in the suit we bought you for Easter He wanted me to give them away but I didn t Signorino I said I did but I didn t I brushed them along with his

I knew it couldn t be for ever you couldn t do that to him You will wear this one with the blue tie You must look well for him when he sees you you must look like before But your hair Dr Garth what will we do about your hair?

Garth was looking around at his room It was the same the sunny spacious room the pleasantest of the house He watched the maid place the sheets and blankets on his bed while Umberto ran jerkily from closet to bureau pulling drawers out aimlessly closing them opening them again running out to the hall closets for towels and returning empty handed standing at last before him with bare joy in the clouded brown eyes whose brown irises were circled with white—blinking smiling and tender

Garth rubbed his hand over the rough bristle of his scalp where the close-cropped hair had barely started to grow since his last tonsure

I don t think there s much we can do about that Umberto he said Don t worry about it Father saw me yesterday

I know He didn t tell me about it I didn t ask, but I knew There Dr Garth there is your bed and now I ll draw your bath and I ll get you your lunch Would you like a steak now Dr Garth or some shrimps? We have some fresh shrimps for tonight Would you like a shrimp curry and a nice salad? They didn t give you anything to eat did they? They shouldn t starve all those young men like that God doesn t like that They need food even if they don t do anything all day long but pray They still should feed the stomachs

I am not hungry said Garth. I ll wait until dinner Don t bother about me now I don t want anything

But you will h ve a few small shrimps insisted Umberto almost crying with the nice hot sauce you like And some ha d rolls and a little coffee? It won t take any time at all And look how thin you are he said watching the young man throw his coat on the bed. Mamma Mia do they have many young men in there? They shouldn t take them in if they don t have the money to feed them. No no forg ve me I am an old fool Sign rino it doesn t concern me it isn t my business I won t say anything more against the holy men Go away Emma that s all The bed is made

go down and start the coffee No I ll make it Start the shrimps and clean them well He is fussy He does want them clean!

I ll bring it all up myself he said to Garth. You just go on and take your bath and I ll bring you your tray in here and you can rest and eat quietly with your books the way you used to when you were home at Christmas Ah Signorino if you knew what a Christmas we had this year God forgive me I couldn t live through another one like that with your poor father

All right said Garth to get rid of him I ll have a shrimp salad and some coffee And I ll sleep then I think I didn t sleep much last night

It was the same and yet it wasn t the same any more this room which he had left and to which he had returned so many times. It was his room and the room of a stranger of the man on the dead side of the bridge on the past side of time It was the room of his loneliness the room of his dark and angry youth, the sterile room, where he had grown from boyhood to adolescence and young manhood the room where he had brought his vacuous dreams his school successes The room to which he had returned a physician, to which he had returned a soldier to which he had to return a monk no more The many faces of his past the multiple ghosts of the man he had been rose now before him and considered him calmly with quiet disdain and with hostility

Yes he thought I am finished These walls have caught me and I am held My life has been taken from me I am to be a child again. There is nothing else

He sat heavily on the bed swiftly shocked by its yielding He slipped off his shoes There is nothing else God can be here I must learn to find Him here to bring Him here to love all those He has made And keep on working The part time seeker the part time lover Oh God I have loved the beauty of your house and the site where resides your glory

He rose crossed the room his stockinged feet meeting the soft response of the deep-piled carpet and drew out the crucifix given him that morning by his Superior He looked around him. The walls were bare as he had always wanted them except for the picture

of his mother and a colour photomicrograph above the desk Cross in hand he looked at the photomicrograph It was the print of a colour film he had made through a ten power lens during his first year in medical school the internal ear of a fœtus taken through a microscope a section of which he had been very proud. The bone stained by haematoxylin-eosin w s deep purple with the sharp island of cartilage lighter pink at the edges while the delicate convolutions of the cochlea cleanly and neatly cut stood out against the white of the empty spaces A good job he thought but the boy who had done that job and had been proud of it was here no longer and the dream of science and accomplishment seemed trivial after the larger d eam

Eight months male fœtus X100

And that also was God s creature he thought For the first time in the many years that the picture had hung on his wall he wondered about the child dead so shortly before birth the discarded fœtus and th [illegible]

You must not spoil me any more he told the old man I will take care of myself now I can quite well fill my own tub And make my bed and brush my clothes

Dr Garth! cried Umberto You said you h d come back You said it would be like before!

His bath taken his lunch finished to the l st tendril of greens to the last shrimp Ga th put down his book Reading was empty He listened a moment to the household noises then went to his record cabinet

Here they were all the friends whose voices he had missed in the monastery more than any other portion of his past more than the microscope and the trephine more than the oper ting room more than his father more than the freedom of his own thoughts Music in the monastery was the clean steady austerity of the Gregorian chant The organ and men s voices singing in unison according to the notes written down five hundred years ago when music was the language of address to the Eternal. Or else it was the songs of birds calling out their trivial problems curiously moving in

a world of silence But here was the young Mozart and Toscanini s Brahms Menuhin s Corelli and the piercing eloquence of Lotte *Lehmann singing Schumann And Serkin playing* Beethoven, Schnabel playing Beethoven Backhaus playing Beethoven And Casadesus and Casals——

Avidly almost guiltily he took the Myra Hess Opus 110 and [illegible] on his [illegible] e of [illegible] oble phrases entered him coursing with his blood in their full, satisfactory cadence This was the joy against which there could be no fighting He abandoned himself to his hunger and for the first time in two days without words without anger he could pray

Umberto ran down the stairs as fast as his arthritic joints would allow The doctor he thought the doctor he must know He mustn t spend another miserable hour without knowing his son is home He mustn t leave the office and go wherever he was last night He must come here right away right away

Then he remembered the psychiatrist Dr Johnston There is that man who put all these terrible thoughts in my doctor s head the night before last Here he is still coming between the father and the son doing no good to anyone just to make them sick and shamed inside I ll get rid of him he told himself The doctor can t [illegible] d I can. If the [illegible] ore [illegible] He'll yell but he ll be pleased I know him

He knocked at Dr Johnston s door heard him answer and went in

I have good news sir he said putting the suitable blankness of his butler s role on his face I thought you might want to know The doctor s son Dr Garth he is back

Dr Johnston put down his pen and said in genuine pleasure He s back! When do you mean? Just now?

Just now said Umberto He s in his room now He s come home to stay

I ll be darned, said Johnston That s good news Umberto He pushed away the papers upon which he had been writing That s really good news—I hope he added after a moment of reflection Does he know I am here?

I have said nothing said Umberto deliberately I thought it best I say nothing I thought it best to say all was natural nothing has happened all was like before Just like he had come home from school been out for visiting with some friends during the vac tion.

Dr Johnston smiled Very admirable Umberto very discreet and admirable of you. Tell me now Dr Taikkes is he informed yet?

[illegible]

him

call him

Johnston laughed out loud then thinking of the old man s hurt feelings wiped the laughter off Of course Umberto you are right I am definitely *de trop* here *Di troppo* is that the way you say it in Italy? Later perhaps he will want to reach me

Stolidly Umberto waited A swell of irritation rose in Johnston Does he intend to give me my hat and coat and escort me to the door? Damn these foreign servants anyway Still we have none of our own Umberto he said aloud how long have you been with Dr Taikkes?

Umberto made a vague gesture I say twenty years he said but I have said twenty years a long time It goes so fast now I can t count all the years b ck I don t like the counting I held Dr Garth in my arms

That s right pull out ll the stops thought Johnston That gives you the right to throw me out That s a long time he said. He d ew out a cigarette and lit it

He s thin thin said Umberto Like a beggar in the streets His face like this He sucked his flabby ch ks in no sily But I gave him his lunch and he s sleeping now I ll give him good food H ll be all r ght I ll take care of him

Yes said Johnston and wondered He ll be all right He s sleeping now? Well anyway I wouldn t want to see him now But I am going to write him a letter I am writing Dr Taikkes and then I ll write a note for Dr Garth. You will give these notes to them. I am leaving at four he said consulting his watch In a little over an hour and I ll not see them again Go phone Dr Taikkes now and at a quarter to four get a cab for me

He waited for the door to close on Umberto again and then with a sigh drew toward him the papers on which he had been working since morning and brusquely tore them up Here goes a fine bit of palliative prose he said to himself So much the better I doubt that Taikkes would have bothered to understand it Let them fight it out The outcome is predictable The winner wins again But will he win happily?

He drew out a fresh sheet of paper scribbled a few words, signed his name and wrote Dr Hjalmar Taikkes on the envelope. Then he got up and went to the door

He had not been mistaken Music piano music was being played and the sound came from the room above the library Garth s room He listened a moment thoughtfully In what sta e of mind had the young man returned to the home he had rejected? How was he to bring into accord the profound upheaval of his emotions and the banal occupation of the moment? Umberto who was a little deaf no doubt had said he was sleeping Was it perhaps to prevent him from trying to see his patient? Johnston would have given a good deal to sit with Garth just now and engage him in conversation. But the initiative could no longer come from him. The situation which to him was provocative above any other in the field of psychiatry was at hand forbidden to him by every law of good taste He shrugged his shoulders and returned to his desk

Twenty-one years had passed since Johnston had put aside the thick well typed well bound manuscript of his thesis—*The The ry of Punishment in Various Religions A Comparative Study*—promising himself that the study of the effect of religion on the personality would become his contribution to the young science Except for voluminous notes scattered throughout th years and a short monograph on Buchmanism he had done nothing more about it I

really ought to get to work, he thought regretfully If I am ever to do anything worthwhile with it. I should start now Put some sort of order in that chaos and begin rewriting it in earnest. Leave something to Millie that she may start from anyway As a psychiatrist she naturally might turn to children and religion and education which are closely bound in our civilization. Up to a point of course. But there I am doing just what I blame Taikkes for dreaming of my child s life building a situation with myself on a ladder and getting ready for the inevitable crack up Will that boy Garth be happy? Can he be happy outside of his milieu now that he has had a try at it? Can he fall back naturally into the pattern of the son partner Will Taikkes be scared enough to loosen the bonds or will Garth have to break them again And if he does what form will that revolt take I wish I could talk to him!

Pen in hand, he sat one moment, absorbed in thought then he shrugged his shoulders impatiently What the devil does it matter whether he blames me for this or not The point is can he take it? And if he can t then what I hope his Superior out there furnished him with a crutch before he sent him away or else we ll have Dr Taikkes Jr cracking up instead of Taikkes Sr and each for the same cause although in a slightly different perspective For having been deprived of their immortality The need for this immortality that is what Freud and Jung failed to recognize although they were both close to it circled around it and then stopped out of curiosity for the richness of the terrain which led to it Sex the self perpetuation through the flesh superiority complex the perpetuation of the mind. In both cases the symbol instead of the end purpose. And the confusion of their followers is due to the fact that they failed to reach the centre of the thought how nature comes to terms with the unnatural how man can bring himself to accept death. Senility disintegration impotence and death In the absurd necessity of accepting the inevitable electric chair sooner or later lies the reason for the common madness of the modern man. While man had to struggle sixteen hours a day for his daily bread, that struggle was enough the victory over the hunger of the morrow filled his daily hours But now except for the believers——

Suddenly Dr Johnston seized his pen and started writing

DEAR DR GARTH

I do not know exactly what motives led you to leave the monastery I believe that your father s visit and mine had something to do with it. I hope that this decision will continue to seem to you as it seems to me an outsider just and moral and, in time fruitful

The problem of deciding what to do may be more difficult to [illegible] fy your

[illegible]

lowing suggestion

I have for the past twenty years been at work as far as time [illegible] Religion

[illegible]

an illumination of each by the other

If collaboration on a work of this nature interests you, I would very much appreciate hearing from you I believe that you have much to contribute to such a study and that together we might, if not complete it at least make something of value of it. I should add that while I am not a man of religious belief I am forced to recognize within men or without the existence of what you as a Catholic call the Holy Ghost.

I wonder thought Dr Johnston as he sealed the envelope whether Millie would like him?

22

AT a quarter past four Dr Taikkes having forgotten his keys at the office pounded the bell of his front door He pushed past the maid and rushed into the library Not here He ran into the drawing room Not here Into the study Not here Emma her eyes inert, watched his stormy progress He returned to her and seized her arm Where is he? he cried.

He left said the woman. Umberto got him a cab about fifteen minutes ago

Taikkes face turned from red to white Left! he cried Left! Are you crazy? Left for where Oh lord I mustn t strangle her Where did he go? When is he coming back? Talk!

Emma stepped backwards I don t know she said He said nothing Nothing to me

But Umberto was already cascading down the staircase trusting his joints to Providence He is here he cried Right in his room. You go on up but go softly He is asleep Don t wake him up Doctor He s so tired he fell asleep

Taikkes fell heavily into the cathedral chair in the elbow of the staircase His hat fell to the floor His head dropped forward and the sigh that rent his chest was so raucous and so deep that for one moment Umberto felt his master had given up the gho t. When Taikkes lifted his face a moment lat r it was drenched with tears. Umberto turned away from him and then pushing Emma before him he entered the pantry where for the second time that day he took it upon himself to fire her

There are moments in life when the fluid rush of time is caught and set like metal to remain unalterably cast in the memory Taikkes lived that moment felt the full weight of its joy and of its

bitterness when he entered his son s room Garth was still asleep Umberto had come in and out turning off the gramophone lowering the shades so that the bright afternoon sunlight now waning would not strike his face not disturb the young man s exhausted sleep Taikkes stood beside him, taking in avidly the sight of his son considering in the growing twilight of the room the flat planes of his face the deeply circled lids the nose—high bridged and as autocratic as his own—the mouth finer than his more sinuous less sensually drawn and which in sleep had the tender innocence of early youth. Before the son he had lost and won again but won in such cruel surrender he felt afraid For one black and vertiginous moment he wished he could keep him so unspeaking unreproachful alive but asleep without having to bear the responsibility of his happiness He wished to own his physical being the still ferment of his quietly breathing body all his unresolved powers and not to see them measured up against the betraying forces of life He felt that the figure of his son blurred in the fixity of his own glance, had in its obstinate sleep a quality of rejection and of judgment against him And when Garth s hand moved restlessly on the counterpane he felt a dread of the words he would say and of what his eyes would hold of anger or of despair

Garth! he said in a forced unnatural voice Garth! Wake up!

At once the figure of his son contracted and he sat up without letting go of his breath. *Et cum spiritu tuo* he said.

Taikkes laughed a high nervous laughter He went to the window and jerked up the blinds Wake up he said and none of that damned Latin here You re home He turned to Garth and saw with piercing sorrow the painful blush invade the young man s face Sorry he said I ve caught you off base

Dad

So it s Dad now It was Father yesterday Confusing isn t it? Taikkes went on hearing his own words in horror and unable to stop How many fathers did you have yesterday and how man brothers hey? Must be a let down to come back to only one a this one at that Quite a family you got yourself adopted into T me how did you manage to escape?

Garth rubbed his hand across his face as though to wipe c

mask of pain. I am back he said dully You wanted me to leave I left

I whistled and you came home Is that it? You obey the whistle now? Is that the way they made you out there? Did you come back because you wanted to or did they force you?

Garth did not reply

I should not ask you, said the father contemptuously You might start singing psalms—in a soprano voice perhaps——

Garth s face jerked upward as tooth on tooth the jaw set in an animal gesture of rage He took a deep breath and rose He crossed the room put a dressing gown over his pyjamas and sat down When he faced his father again his countenance had changed

Sit down Father he said We must talk now

I went too far thought Taikkes I want to open my arms to him and instead—oh fool damn fool that I am damned damned fool

Damned fool! he said aloud

I may seem a fool said Garth but I know what I am about You should know too I have come back because I was asked to return because I was made to see that I was making a grave error and because of that failing altogether in my purpose When I understood this I agreed He rubbed his head with his hand his frowning brow oddly at variance with the smooth scalp

And what in the name of all that s sacred was that purpose?

A perfect way of life said Garth

Is castration a perfect way of life or is it a desecration? said his father

But what s this obsession with castration! cried Garth. What on earth makes you think——

[illegible]

difference between the living nd the dead?

I am not arguing said Garth. I m not even asking you to understand All I ask is respect for my beliefs

I can t g ve it to you said Taikkes heavily I cannot respect what I don t understand Do I have to buy your presence here with a pack of lies?

Garth s eyes were fixed on something on the wall behind his father s head And without having seen it Taikkes guessed what it was and guessed also more than he heard Garth s answer If that s the best you can do yes If you please

Garth leaned forward and spoke more loudly now I only want——

Yes said his father sitting heavily on the foot of the bed I know You want peace And all I can do is nag and harass you. I d give you the world and everything I have I want you well and happy and successful and all I can do is to nag you like an old woman like the cretin I am No that s the truth I don t have the sense that animal of an Umberto has who can t even read the headlines and who waits now listening at the door with some wine or some milk for you I can t even ask you to forgive me Garth, because I ll nag you again every day of my life

He got up and walked fitfully through the room Every cursed day of my accursed life Garth. I ll quarrel with you and push you around son my son my son Garth look at me I ll quarrel with you I ll push you around I ll force you to hate me I ll force you to fury I ll force you to remember my age and count my years, those I have lived and those which remain and look upon my death as a deliverance Go away from me he cried pushing away Garth s arm from his shoulders Can t you see I can t do it. There is only one thing I want The whole world be damned. I only want this and I can t do it I can t keep from loving you in the crass love of a father from wanting your life to be my life Go away from me before I destroy you as Johnston said I would before——

Stop it cried Garth. Stop this! I am here and I ll stay here do you hear? You won t destroy me Nobody can And you won t nag me because I won t let you You don t dare and I won t let you!

You won t? said Taikkes almost humbly

No said Garth It hurts you it hurts us both Please be calm. You don t understand my feelings Very well leave them alone. We won t discuss it again There are other meeting grounds There is your work.

My work said Taikkes bitterly That is good. I m not even

good for that any more Open the door I hear that fool with his tray He shakes now you know Parkinson s

Garth opened the door took the tray from Umberto s hand and smiled reassuringly at the butler Umberto shook his head warn ingly with a prayer in his eyes then closed the door and started down the steps

Garth put the tray on the table and pushed toward his father the cup of broth and the bread sticks You d better have this he said I ate not long ago

Taikkes looked at him sombrely You need fattening he said Umberto knows best He took the bread stick and broke it in two That s for the dog he said.

Garth looked up interrogatively He had seen no dog in the house The dog? he said

Me said Taikkes Me the barking dog the howler Garth I killed a woman this morning He se zed the cup in both hands drained it and replaced it on the table Garth silent now waited

Well said his father aren t you going to ask m ?

In surgery? asked Garth

Where are my cigarettes? said Taikkes irritably Sure it was in surgery I don t go trotting fter women with blunt instrument I w

co

A patient of Petra s A diverticulum of the aorta a sort of aneurysm A blown up heart Twenty-eight two children two caesarians A bad case The ribs were eroded Circulation fouled up Aneurysms don t give symptoms usually but this one did. Too much of the blood was diverted into the sac The left ventricle was the size of my fist Slum poor doing her own work going down hill And

my chart

there If

cared You would have said I d rather die in my bed when my time comes Maybe b tween now and then something else ill be found A new g dget a new way—— You would have waited for me I would have been there For you——

What happened? said Garth.

I didn t even see the woman I came in late I saw the X-rays while I was scrubbing The size of the ballooning the mottling of the aorta I said to myself it s too far gone He ll kill her I rushed in to stop it but damn it to-hell I was too late. Stull had put in the clamp to tie off the sac and the aorta popped

Good heavens! said Garth stricken.

Yeah. I ve never seen anything like it So I went out in the hall and the ass your brother Stull I mean stopped by after a while to tell me he had to talk to the relatives These people says he like to have an explanation I forgot to tell you, the girl was a Japanese. Smug you know as if he was doing them a favour So I told him to get the hell out and stay out

You fired him?

I fired him.

Well—— said Garth uncertainly

I fired him He s good but he s not that good I should have been there though. He didn t do it Garth I did. How to kill in absentia A monograph by Hjalmar Taikkes Musurus Memorial Hospital s Chief Surgeon——

Father please!

I did I tell you I killed her And I get mad at Stull Mind you, at him not at me I give him the sack. What sort of man am I, tell me Garth? What kind of man does that make me?

Oh Dad said Garth the same kind of man you ve always been What can I say? You were angry you had every right to be angry You say you would have been there if I was operating Very well but then I would have waited

I think so too said Taikkes You would have waited and so should he But he thinks he s tops He thinks he s better than I. Smarter That I am finished doddering senile like Umberto here. And that s what makes me mad I would have kicked him out even if he d succeeded And more happily

It is awkward said Garth. I can see how you feel And yet—I wish you d think a little more about it Because of me

Because of you? asked his father How is that? It comes in very nicely as a matter of fact That woman s dead I m sore about

it and it gives me the pretext I want to get rid of him Now you can come in the office and no one can say I m unfair about it

They will though, said Garth I m not thinking of the office so much, but mostly about the hospital That will drop him automatically from the staff since he got his patients from the office and it s awkward for me

But I don t want him in the office I ve hated the sight of that man ever since—ever since you ran out on me Garth Garth why don t you tell me the truth? You ve come back to stay haven t you? You mean it it isn t just a trick

Yes said Garth slowly I ve come back and I m staying But I am not sure about surgery any more I ve been away from it too long It doesn t mean anything to me any more Perhaps—I don t know——

That s impossible said Taikkes Garth you re the best damned surgeon You are slow you are too damn slow but you re perfect. You don t want you can t want to give that up For what tell me for what now?

Let me think about it said Garth. Let me feel my way around I have thought a little about other fields in medicine Let me look around check on available fellowships Give me time

How long do you need? asked Taikkes bitterly

I ve been back five hours said Garth.

No said Taikkes you haven t been back. You never left You ve just pulled me out of a nightmare Don t start thinking up another!

Garth smiled a tired smile Dad he said do me a favour Keep Stull a little longer Don t let him leave Musurus under such a strike as that. And give me a couple of months I need it

Do you want me to take him back?

I wish you would said Garth.

Taikkes looked at his son with such tenderness that the young man turned his eyes away in embarrassment

All right said Taikkes Tell him I ll take him back. Tell him I m doing it because you re back and that I am happy He took his son s hand and rubbed it against his forehead. Get dressed he said I yelled so much I m hungry

23

NICK was dreaming Fevered and anxious he was running from a wordless and shifting danger down a staircase whose steps were disconnected and heaving as in an earthquake He was pulling his mother with him leaping with miraculous agility across the gaps of the stairs His mother had a wound in her chest which needed sewing right away right away and he had nothing with which to sew it no silk, no thread no catgut If he could find his violin, he could use the catgut of the strings or the wire E She kept her apron pressed against the wound to hide it from him pretending nothing had happened and soon it would be too late They were waiting for him the orchestra was already on the podium. It was the high school orchestra but this wasn t the auditorium it was a series of rooms opening into each other without pattern or meaning He could not hear the music nor recognize what he was playing The violin he held in his left hand was of an incredible weight It was crushingly heavy and if he kept it any longer bear ing down on his arm it would damage his brachial nerve and paralysis would ensue His fingers were already numb from the strings and still he kept on bowing He could not stop he had to go on improvisingly wildly and he hoped in an agony of shame that they would not notice the unexplainable loss of his clothes The violin kept grinding its suffocating weight into his chest into his shoulder He had to fight to wrench himself free and when he did finally Mitsu s body shifted in his arms and he felt the dead weight of her against his heart

Mitsu was asleep in the fixed tragic sleep of the autopsy room. Her mouth was frozen shut the gleaming prominent teeth were clenched and he could not force the breathing tube into her lung Taikkes was operating still He had to hurry and get her breathing started and the anaesthesia and the transfusion He had no voice

ɔ warn Taikkes that he must stop Petra should be watching ut she was watching Taikkes instead watching his face and his nouth hungrily No not Petra that was impossible Why should he be staring like that at the old man? Taikkes was laughing at ter and turned the surgical light upon her so he could see now he bruise under her eyes and the ghoulish hunger of her mouth ıow that her face was bare now that at the base of the slender ɪeck her mask was untied and hanging with its lipstick stain like ɪ kiss abandoned to anyone on her chest Nick transfixed with horror saw his hand Taikkes hand his red and white hand his Islamu hand stretch forward and seek the beat of Petra s heart In frenzied horror feeling himself ripped in two he watched unable to tear himself from the sight of this thing he could not believe but which was happening unendingly right under his eyes the heavy obese knotty and distorted fingers the gouty sweaty and ancient fingers the stubby fingers stubbily nailed with the coarse nails hornily ridged grasping her crushing the tender pulp of her body the body he had made his own

He managed to scream at last horror laden which woke him up He sat up shivering and sweating in the near zero temperature f the open windowed room Awake but still trembling he moaned gain awakening Petra and having found her could not speak uld not explain to himself the monstrous insult of his nightmare t could only rub his face against hers press her to him ascer ʼning to himself the reality of her being

Darling he said a little later I am sorry I m hungry
he patted his shoulder misunderstanding
No he said piteously I am hungry I mean really I am d. I think I am going to die Do you have anything to eat ing at all?
h Nick! she said annoyed not now! She turned toward ninous face of the clock. It s only a little after three You want to eat at three o clock in the morning
he said I do I want food. I can t remember when I

t up and reached for her dressing gown You exhausting

puppy she said. All right stop growling I ll find you something What do you want?

Anything he said absolutely anything I d give ten years of my life for a steak Do you have a steak Petra

No she said I don t. I don t eat in. She groped for the light, cringing from Nick s eyes feeling herself livid undone in the fatigue of the last twenty four hours I ll see what I can find.

I m sorry he said again He followed her into the kitchen tying about his waist the corners of the silk counterpane I'm a nuisance You ll hate me Let me plug in the coffee-maker What do you have in the refrigerator?

Scrounge she said I ll powder my nose

Powder your nose said the face in the mirror

No said Petra no powder She faced herself with hard-staring eyes acknowledging freely the more-than-dislike the contempt, quiet ice-cold that she had for herself Her mouth moved in iron Congratulations she said to the image You ve made a nice catch, Theodora Petrie You sent your husband away you refused good old Taikkes And this is what you sleep with. Damn damn and damn you

She brushed her blonde hair with short jarring strokes pulling it away from her face where the flesh was giving a little no v where age was starting cruelly to break away the elastic firmness of the skin to pluck away the muscular fibres to loosen imperceptibly but without pause the pure outline of her face to transform wha. she had been into someone else whom she refused to believe could ever be called by her name Something that had nothing to do *with a woman in love*

Damn she said to herself What does it matter? What has th grow old, to do with you? You are something e member? You are a physician you h nose put on some lipstick Must yc must you embarrass him because y you ve been behaving like a country g you behave like a harridan and take it o self decent that s the least you can do no

She buttoned the collar of her yellow dressing gown the quilted thing carefully chosen when she had decided to see her husband after all, and resolutely entered the bed living room The window was closed now and the radiator hissed cheerfully The bed was torn open and the bedclothes were on the floor on top of Nick s dingy shoes on top of his shirt and tie. Very nice she thought very nice work, Petra. That s what comes of taking in the boy scouts for the night Nick, she said where are you?

A clatter of dishes answered her Here he said. You told me to scrounge I did.

Standing at the sink a bottle of milk beside him happily burning the toast Nick was standing taller than ever in her small kitchen

Darling! he said

Once more the all enveloping embrace the tough young arms tightening about her to the point of pain to the point of anguish again the sting of the unshaven face against her neck

No Nick don t, no not now—— The words floated away alien to her futile against his will Damn it she cried Let go! You re not a bit good for me Nick. You re a catastrophe a hurri cane.

She pushed him down into the chair pressed his silly ears back close to his head and then pulled them hard He started eating happily

Call the Red Cross Disaster Unit he said Let them bring us mountains of food, pounds of butter entire beeves roasted or r w Look out I m eating everything There ll be nothing l ft at all for your breakfast I ll ruin you Petra I ll eat you out of house and home

Go on she said I ll man ge

There were some sardines he said And some eggs——

Sardines? Wh t a breakfast!

He gave her an apologetic glance There wer he said b it no nore Delicious in a sandwich with orange m rm lade

She waited a b t to compose herself

Do you always eat in the middle of the night

When I can he said But I don t have to Look just feed me once a day At five o clock like the lions or the seals No I mean it. I truly hadn t eaten a thing in ages Or did I? There was that ma. with his brother in law in the restaurant Gastric ca I guess No I don t remember Really Petra I ll be an awful expense to you I have no money at all It will be years before I make anything

Oh she said. She put down her cup with an odd pinch of the heart. Did he think did he mean this to be an established affair an every night business whenever he was able to sign out at the hospital? Was she to be—— Damn she thought you fool, Petra, you fool!

Look Nick——

Cigarette?

No she said not now Look Nick——

Darling I am looking he said I can t do anything else. I am looking so hard that my food tastes of you and it s wonderful Darling sweet I look at you and I think I am crazy I think I am in the psycho ward Some of them think they are kings and Napoleons don t they? I think I am here with you Petra Then he added hesitantly Petra you re not sorry?

His eyes intense insistent were hard upon hers Does one give and refuse give and refuse again

nths and months
t stop dreaming

of you Night after night—but not tonight you know!—it s been the same thing Petra I ve waked up with you in my arms—if you only knew—so many times and wept like a child because I was kissing a pillow! Don t laugh at me

I m not laughing said Petra who was killing a yawn I d like to know Do you often get obsessions like that?

I love you he said Don t you know? Didn t you guess? I used to follow you around I managed to meet you all over the place. I tried to guess when you d come in and I d be in the lobby And riding the elevators like a madman so the boys thought I was checking on them or that I was crazy—and I am of course. And

I d look on the board to see when you d get in and walk the floors wherever you had a patient—and you wouldn t even see me most times not even say hello I was just one more white coat for you, another resident not I at all not me

I saw you she said

'Did you? Did you? And you didn t say anything I tried to think of intelligent things I might talk to you about. I read the medical journals by the dozen, even *Time* magazine after I saw you buy it once in the shop I d rehearse clever things that would make you notice me and when I d try them on for size, you didn t seem to hear Then once you don t even remember I was in surgery all afternoon and the whole day was over and I hadn t seen you at all. The whole wretched day was wasted and then right behind me I heard your voice. The patients were wheeled away I was straightening the plaster room and then you came in. You wanted Taikkes list of patients that I had and when I gave it to you you put your arm around me Do you remember, Petra, do you remember?

She remembered a paper torn in two because he had clutched it so hard. Yes she said I thought, the boy s spastic, but he's controlling it well.

Petra, that s awful. How can you—now? And then once I was on Dermott s service I think, and I d been preparing for the paper for the Surgical Seminar and I was dizzy with figures that night. You had made your rounds——

My rounds! she said Seen my two patients, maybe."

'You were through. You had a yellow dress and a hat with little flowers——

I ve thrown it away she said That horrible thing Much too young for me I m trying she thought desperately I've got to try

You were leaving and I was too I was going to the drugstore for a malted I had missed my dinner And you saw me and you said I m driving down town Are you going down town?

And you said no you were going for a malt, didn t you?

Yes he cried and stretched his arms across the table to her and laid his head on her open palms, laughing [illegible]

I said I was walking to the corner Idiot idiot when I could have driven with you Petra!

She rose then and coming to him she put her arm around his shoulder My dear she said you mustn t take me so seriously It isn t right. You re very sweet

He straightened up and pulled her to him and put his cheek against hers Don t he said Don t say anything Don t, Petra. I love you

No she said you don t You ve made it up out of a bunch of wild dreams

How can you!

I mean it she said seriously I am thirty seven Nick How old are you twenty four twenty five?

I don t know he cried I don t care it doesn t matter I love you I love you I love you You can t change it you can t do any thing about it and I can t either and I don t want to do you hear? I want you I want you and only you out of the entire whole world. I want only you for all the days of my life and all the nights and every hour and minute of my life and when you re a hundred, I ll be eighty-eight and what difference does it make I ll love you anyway!

But Nick she said you re not much more than a boy I ve lived I ve been married I ve been divorced You need somebody to grow up with, not someone like me to tell you what to do, what not to do not a fancy mother with flowers on her hat!

I ve got a mother he said I don t need another one You'll meet her She runs a laundry he said You d like her And my sister too

Petra swallowed with pain an irresistible desire to scream with laughter Yes she said I know I would. But there are a whole lot of people we have to live with. What would they think?

They ll have to get used to it. To you and me to us together

She said nothing She worked herself free from his arm, she rose and took his dishes and took them to the sink her face closed now her eyes dull

Darling he said it doesn t worry you does it? What people think?

How can you ask me that? she said What do you think of me that you can say that? Careful she said to herself Don t get angry don t start hurting him

I what do I think of you Petra I m not thinking I don t need to Don t put thoughts in my head that aren t there I only thought why should you care? This isn t an affair a pickup I love you Oh hell how else can I say it? I love you I m not seducing you I m not a cheap Casanova Petra!

an

Pe

right—— He pressed her head against him caressing her hair rubbing his cheek against the top of her head with sorrow with delight ——don t tell me yet You don t know I ve crowded you I haven t given you a chance I m an idiot He tried to lift her face toward him but she kept it obstinately lowered so he kissed her forehead seeking with his lips the roots of the soft undone blonde curls the tender closed lids and then pressed her desperately to him trying to offer her not the thrill not the passion but the sweetness the effusion of his love for her holding her quietly against him until he felt her relax in his arms Then he lifted her hands to his face and kept them there until her eyes met his not in anger any more not reproachful nor even uncertain

It was then that the telephone rang

She pushed him away from her and lifted the telephone off its hook.

Garth she said What on earth! Yes No I wasn t sleeping What is it? An emergency? Yes of course they re short handed Your father is operating? Oh no not that! I ll be there in five minutes

Petra replaced the receiver staring at it unbelievingly Then she heard Nick, already scrambling into his clothes speaking with a new directness and urgency Hurry up Petra We d better get going It must be a lulu of a case if they ve got the old man out at this time of night

24

DAVE STULL had passed several hotels and restaurants on his way to the hospital but it did not occur to him to stop there for dinner A blind automatism urged him on to the place where for the four years that preceded his marriage he had eaten slept, worked and perfected the man he had become While he was aware acutely of the meaning of Ta [illegible] h life still he went unthinking [illegible] cafeteria steam table [illegible] asked himself why he had come The room was crowded alive with the animal radiation of healthy young people and with the hot smells of food But the accustomed faces filing beside him had, he thought curiosity and mockery in them and he felt uneasy

Tray in hand he pivoted slowly in the middle of the room seeking an empty table From the farthest end of the cafeteria someone signalled to him He pretended not to notice The interns were clustered around the large tables crowding good naturedly into each other happy in their proximity At the smaller tables a few women were sitting with the men residents wives who were permitted two meals a week with their men student nurses enjoying the only treat the unpaid interns could offer to their dates—a dinner in the doctors cafeteria

Stull had a hard look for them He did not like this violation of the man s clubroom atmosphere and was annoyed to find all the small tables taken He put down his tray at the end of the long side table and at once regretted it when one of the white-clad men raised his head from his plate and Stull recognized Sandstrom

Hi Dave he said then nodding to the woman across from him, Know my wife?

We ve met said Dave How do you do

He barely recognized the woman but he remembered the dress although it was tightly belted now and close about the waist. He had never seen her in anything else Dido s new dress unnoticed poor child. The slave bracelets bright on the warm sheen of the slender arm Dido why did you have to lie to me! Because it was a lie It had to be a lie

The [illegible]

of three

fill Stu

shelved because of him.

Do you often eat here? he asked Gerda Sandstrom Doesn t the conversation get you down?

It isn t the conversation she said it s the food

Good enough for me said Sandstrom

Your gastric juices are more potent than mine, said the woman and laughed She had strong even teeth a clear skin, a wide round childlike forehead Her neck rose strong and full from her shoulders She wore no make-up and was not less attractive because of it

What do you do with your child he asked remembering that she had been pregnant when he had seen her last Do you leave him alone when you come here?

Heavens no she said The landlady takes care of her

It s a girl said Sandstrom Mary eight months fifteen pounds four teeth.

Pictures? asked Stull bearing down into his food

Sandstrom shook his head We had one taken he said The grandmothers have it

Gerda put her hand on her husband s sleeve Dear she said you do have a picture Don t be bashful now show it to the nice man.

Sandstrom shrugged. Bah he said self-consciously that squinting snapshot. He s seen thousands of them They are all alike

I ll look at th t one said Dave since it s yours

Sandstrom looked at him in astonishment then putting down his fork, fished in his pocket for his wallet, snapped it open and

passed it to Stull Our landlady took it he said, the day my wife came home There s not enough light in it. You can t see the baby s eyes Not much to look at.

Not much. Two shabby people and an infant sleeping Sand his

of her nose crossing her face looking down Mary—now eight months fifteen pounds and four teeth—here a squashy mass against her mother s breast a nonentity a grievous expense a nuisance, the child. In the background behind the sofa a Woolworth potted plant a bazaar lamp a drugstore radio Not even poverty Shabbiness And the ecstasy of their smiles

Very pretty said Stull returning the snapshot Then vaguely She looks like you

In love Plain love unaffected uncomplicated. A love that set no private boundaries no his or hers that chose not to wait for its fruition a woman undemanding a man who could take care of his own a world where money was what the other fellow wanted, where success was this—the potted plant the drugstore radio the child Where love was enough

Would Dido be content? What if she were She s never had anything I wouldn t be

No not like me said Gerda Rather like him I think. It s a

What horrible thought!

be doing it our way twenty years from now Supersonic beams atomic fission of the nerve paths what have you The twenty first century surgeon will play his X ray clavichord instead of jingling scalpels and we ll have the Paderewskis and the Serkins of the atomic grid instead of the Mayos and the Ochsners of the operating room.

He s stimulated said Gerda. Pay no attention to him. He works too hard in surgery

Stull caught the warning glance that Sandstrom shot to his wife and the answering blush that rose to her face They were talking about me he thought He told her about this morning She knows.

How will they handle aortic aneurysms? he asked brutally By hypnotism?

He did an aneurysm this morning said Sandstrom to his wife It fizzled

Don t bother pretending said Dave She already knows You told her

Sandstrom reached across the table for his wife s cigarette package lit one and shoved it back to her So what? he said Of course I told Gerda You didn t do it secretly in the basement by candlelight It happened to you It might have to anyone No use getting spastic about it.

I am not spastic said Dave his voice controlled with effort My wife s spastic about it. Taikkes is spastic I m off the staff it seems and I ve got patients scheduled for tomorrow I don t know what to do with them And you say so what?

Real sensitive said Sandstrom between his teeth

But Dave turned to Gerda Naive she looked naive with her big shoulders and her unpainted face with the naivety of the gre t paintings of a Vermeer of a Rembrandt Could she love? Not like Dido no not like Dido Dido why did you do that to me!

and I m glad of that I ll be damned if I see any virtue in teasing the corpse of every unpleasant minute until it putrefies and corrupts the air about me But then I am only a man You re a woman Can you explain women to me?

Gerda s quiet eyes questioned him

Dido he said My wife Dido!

I don t know your wife Dave

She s spastic about it, he said Is that right? Would you be having hysterics if it had happened to Sandy?

It didn t happen to you said Sandstrom angrily It happened to the woman to a Mitsu Watanabe

Would you? repeated Dave

Hell said Sandstrom again his hand on his wife s hand My

wife s not like your wife They don t all feel the same way about things Just because she s a woman——

Would you? said Dave

Yes said Gerda I would

You would not said Sandstrom. You haven t got nerves!

Gerda smiled her warm blue-eyed smile and turned to Dave. Maybe I would not express it the same way your wife does. Maybe I wouldn t say anything about it but way down inside, yes I d have hysterics

But why? said Dave It s a risk a surgeon takes You re his wife You would have to take it

I d have hysterics

Bah said Sandstrom

Why? Can you say why?

Because he would be hurt whether he d say so or not Because there would be nothing I could do about it. Because I love him.

Dido Dido Was that why you lied to me?

But I m not hurt cried Stull above the rattling of the plates and the crash of metal things at the steam table I m not hurt, he cried to Dido s stern and reproachful eyes I m not hurt, I m not slobbering about it! A month three months more or less for that Watanabe woman is that a catastrophe? Is that anything my wife should be convulsed about? And I m supposed to understand that!

But you are said Gerda Hurt I mean

Men should not try to understand women said Sandstrom sagely They understand us That s enough.

Dave threw himself back in his chair Maybe you should see something of Dido he said to Gerda You d be good for her she could help you with your child——

As soon as he had said it he felt embarrassed As though he d betrayed Dido As though she was too much for him or for any man and as though feeling sorry for Gerda he was hiring her because she was poor to train his wife in the ways of women

She s fun he added stiffly I think you d enjoy knowing each other

Gerda nodded politely Sandstrom said nothing People shuffled

around them pushed chairs dropped trays The room was emptying and still Dave could not get up For what? To go where? With what words for Dido? In what mood? Hell and damnation if only she had not talked that way She was lying I saw it in her eyes But why? Why like that? Did she want to be beaten? Did I strike her Did I? What did I do

I wouldn t worry too much about Taikkes said Sandstrom after a silence You know how he blows up And now that his son is back——

What! cried Dave jerked straight in his seat, his son you mean Garth

Who else? said Sandstrom Haven t you heard? It s all over the hospital The old valet he has—Albert, isn t it?—called this afternoon to tell him to hurry home Garth was back. He nearly jumped out of his skin!

I ll be damned! said Stull. Well I ll be damned well what do you know about that! He was breathing hard his voice was choppy and hard So he managed one more trick did he? It was to be expected of course And after all that hullabaloo! I never did take his religion seriously I knew him for what he was a damned dilettante Why the Chief could have spared his blood pressure and relaxed, it was a gesture a slap in the f ce a mean little boy s vengeance——

You are talking to yourself said Sandstrom quietly Watch out.

Didn t you expect him to come back? Did you eally see Brother Garth with a rope around his waist growing turnips for the rest of his life? Could you believe that surgeon like him—
he s g !
better
somet
did you believe that he would give it up forever?

It did seem extraordinary said Gerda Don t you think so Sandy?

And I can see the whole thing now said Stull leaning forward urgently his brow contracted this morning s production I mean Of course idiot that I was I thought that Taikkes had lost

his bearings because of darling Petra s patient! Oh no! It was planned he was getting his little boy back he doesn t need me any more!

I don t think that s it said Sandstrom I don t think he was planning anything

Perhaps Garth is ill said Gerda Perhaps that s why he is coming back.

It was an act said Dave emphatically A vulgar cowardly act. A crapulous comedy that s all

I don [illegible]

thing abc [illegible]

in your [illegible]

Doesn t he? said Dave He s the best actor in the surgical profession and that s tops you know Actors Guild will take him on in a minute when he applies He did it on purpose I tell you Whether you think so or not he did it You can t tell me it s a coincidence that he sends me on my way a half hour before Master Garth comes home to sharpen his scalpel on Papa s razor strop!

That isn t the way of it said Sandstrom for the third time in the same dull obstinate way I know I was there

You were where?

In the dressing room when you were talking to him. All right I eavesdropped if you want to call it that I was too damn embarrassed for both of you to stick my nose out and say cut it out. And he wasn t putting on a show you know that as well as I do He was making a bloody fool of himself as well as of you Dave And whether Garth is back at this time through a coincidence or whether Taikkes threatened to set fire to the whole monastery if he stayed on I don t know But he did not plan it He wouldn t know how

What did he say when he saw you? asked Dave his voice thick with anger

Why don t you go and ask him? said Sandstrom Why don t you go and talk it over with him since you feel that strongly about it? Come Gerda let s get the hell out of here This guy s giving me indigestion

Still rose and watched them leave the room Sandstrom push-

shabby maternity dress with grace with dignity with pride

When they left the room Dave felt his defences crumble He was alone

25

THE DOCTORS Taikkes father and son were still in the dining room when Emma wrapped in a tragic black cloak which became her complexion and her voice—thank heaven she did not sleep in she was only helping Umberto with part of the work grown now too heavy for him—came in to announce Dr Stull

Taikkes looked at his son over the Tortoni What the devil do you suppose he wants?

I don t know said Garth He s probably disturbed. He needs your help

Disturbed hey? You don t know that guy He s probably already consulted his lawyer No I don t want to see him not today I don t know what to say to him he depresses me Send him in! he cried to the retreating Emma What ll I do with him? No son stay where you are I take him back because of you You talk to him and I ll just stay and watch

Garth sat down again The meal weighed heavily on his stomach, unaccustomed to the rich cooking of his father s house But he was grateful for an opportunity to ease what he feared would be an awkward situation between the two men He had counted without Taikkes rapid changes of mood

Come in come in Dave cried Taikkes gesturing largely with his hand Sit down Have you eaten? Good we ll finish our meal while you smoke Umberto a glass of brandy for Dr Stull None for me none for Garth He s on the wagon hey Garth?

Thank you said Dave stiffly How are you, Garth?

He looked acutely uncomfortable thought Garth. As though, ready for a fight he found his gun unloaded and stood there foolishly waving an empty weapon

Don t look at him said Taikkes pushing away the butler and

his glass None for me I said Don t look at him Dave I can hardly bear to look at him myself He embarrasses me as a physician and as a father He looks younger than when he left don t you think? ,

The haircut perhaps said Dave awkwardly

We call it a tonsure said Taikkes gravely A new fad in prep schools All right Garth all right I know and a plague on it all I only hope you won t be imitated at the hospital that s all Give him three months Dave he ll recover

Three months? said Dave stupidly

For my hair Dave said Garth

You mean to stay here though don t you? said Dave Or are you going back?

I m not going back, said Garth

The words were easy to say A casual motion of the lips a casual denial Like Peter questioned by the soldiers I was not among them. I do not know this Man The voice steady unemphatic Within the pain contained as in a vase not to be touched for fear that it might shatter and overflow

Dave considered a moment at a loss to know what to say Then he turned to Taikkes I came to ask you—— he said

I know said Taikkes I m glad you did I m glad you came Garth and I are celebrating his return but *en tete a tete* you kno v it is dull Where is your wife? Why didn t you bring her along?

Dido is not feeling well said D ve harshly Bes des what I really came for——

About this morning? Forget it, said Taikkes Hell no I don t mean forget it. I mean learn f om it but forget what I said G rth here called me eleven kinds of name He gave me a very hand some sermon as matte of fact and I ag ee with everything he said.

So you heard about it, Garth said Dave

Yes said Garth And I am extremely sorry Dave I know

for an hour or so?

Dave began to take heart again He took a long swallow of brandy and then tilting his glass drained it.

Not like that you heathen said Taikkes For heaven s sake what do you think you re drinking bourbon

Look said Dave I didn t come here for a party I didn t come here for drinks I am sorry but—no he said louder let me speak. I ve got to clarify my position that s what I came for I can t go on getting slapped one minute patted on the head the next. Dr Taikkes——

I don t want to think about your position said Taikkes 'I don t want to bother about business

Please Father said Garth Dave is right.

What do you intend to do about me? said Dave leaning forward his empty glass set squarely before him and covered with his hand Am I working for you yes or no?

Well if you put it that way I am very much inclined—— began Taikkes

Of course you are working with Dad interrupted Garth. [illegible] —yes you are, he

I m not putting down an ultimatum said Dave more quietly I am only thinking about the patients and about tomorrow Now if Garth wants to take over——

I don t said Garth.

A look of cruel disappointment crossed Taikkes face but he said nothing He looked from one to the other of the young men and, at last he relaxed.

You are in Dave he said I will not conceal it I would have preferred that Garth came in with me And there is room for both of you. But I ll be patient I ll be patient for several hours Garth, perhaps even a whole day he added with heavy humour In the meantime now that you know where you stand will you be a good boy go get your wife and we ll try to cheer each other up and forget the miseries of today s surgery

I should like to said Dave but to be quite candid my wife and I had quite a quarrel this afternoon Oh no not only about

this wretched business although that s what started it I guess we both let go and delivered ourselves of a few raw words I am afraid——

But that s just it then said Taikkes If you go home she ll greet you like Xantippe with a pot of slop-water over the head Let s send Garth after her She knows you doesn t she he added turning to his son.

Yes said Garth I ve met her At your wedding Dave And quite a party that was

We ll do it all over again said Taikkes with the ardour of a young man. I wish we could get a girl for you Garth but I guess I d better not rush you too hard. You go get her She won t feel like throwing you out since your head is still shaven. With us about to protect you Dave she won t feel like scratching your eyes out which you probably deserve entirely I know women After a couple of drinks she ll forget all about it

Sounds good said Dave Thanks Chief No thanks no more brandy I guess I don t know how to drink.

Garth got up Dave will you call Dido and tell her I m coming?

Dave hesitated

No said Taikkes you just drop in Give him the address Dave and make it snappy Garth, because Dave and I don t know what to talk about.

Talk about me said Garth from the doorway and let me know your conclusions

26

GARTH had been Dave Stull s best man Since the family of the bride was heaven only knew where lost in some little town of the Southwest—if indeed they had not moved again in the unending series of stop and go which had characterized their lives and so far Dido s—the wedding reception had been held at the bridegroom s house where Dr Taikkes sister had presided It had been a strange affair with the most extraordinary number of beautiful girls that had ever been seen together in daylight. The whole line of the Blitz was there a sort of farewell party on which Dido had insisted in loyalty to her sisters-of-the-night and perhaps in the triumph of her vanity and nearly the entire staff of interns and residents of Musurus Hospital. Of the bride herself Garth remembered little A shining little face a figure that was underweight and overdressed in the flounces of the ice-blue ballerina dress that looked more like a dancing costume than wedding clothes—the product of course of the Blitz costume designer—and the swollen lobes of her ears on which were tightly clamped the star sapphire earrings which had been the present of his father

He knocked at the door waited a moment then knocked again regretting that in the usual manner of the physician he had failed to announce himself from the switchboard downstairs At the third knock the door opened and his breath stopped sharply midway to his lungs Dido stood before him dressed only in her bra and petticoat The name *Dave* expired on her lips and with a gasp she fled into the bedroom

Left to himself Garth shrugged his shoulders The little figure, half seen and decently turned away from was so neat and small, her surprise so complete the brief vision so unexpected, so unfocused that his reaction was amusement. He controlled his desire

to laugh though fearing that she might hear him and become even more embarrassed He entered the room picked up a magazine found a pack of Camels struck a match and smoked

Time went back. Long minutes linked to long minutes No sound from the bedroom How long did women take to dress anyway? And how was she dressing? Should he not tell her where she was going and how soon?

Unaccustomed to smoking after the months in the monastery the smoke was unpleasant to his palate He looked at the cigarette with distaste Here already the air was vitiated with all the end products of what was called civilization the redolence of petrol fumes the borborygms of the chimney tops vomiting their sooty spray over the sno v into the nostrils inside the lungs slowly drying the clean pink tissues with their tarry smear Was there an increase in lung cancer in the rural areas or was it confined only to city dwellers? Had anyone answered that question had anyone dared ask it? I might look it up he thought and ground out his cigarette with a shudder breathing deeply in spite of himself the air of the room charged with smoke and a trace of dead cologne

— r L L — d r of the mon

No answer He looked at his watch. Still would be wondering The delay was embarrassing It soon would h ve to be explained

He went to the bedroom door Dido he said I apologize for coming in unannounced. Your husband and my father want you to come over to our place for a drink Can you throw something on quickly? They are waiting for us

He listened a moment then ttled a little the knob of the door He entered The room was dark He th e v on the witch and looked about him without finding her Then quick, gasping sound led his eyes to the bed She v lying on it fully dressed now even to the tall white fu -edged boots a suit and her polo coat. Her hat was bes de the b d on the floor On th floor also her pocketbook. He tried to look at he f ce but t was cove ed with a pillo v

He hesit ted moment Should he go? Leave her to her stupid

little girl shame which might then be transformed into the toxin of agonizing self torture? Well this was exaggeration. A girl who had danced at the Blitz—was it a scene she was making for the purpose of squirting a little amusement into a dull evening alone a home? Whatever it was it had better be disposed of rapidly in as few words as possible so there would be no need for equivocal brooding

He put his hand out and touched her shoulder firmly briefly

Dido he said get up

The hand which held the pillow contracted He pulled the pillow off and she rolled away from him with a harsh choked sound.

I am sorry I broke in like that he said louder It was stupid of me I apologize

No answer

Please don t be distressed about it It was my fault There s nothing to be upset about I m a doctor you know he added, feeling the ridiculousness of it but unable to say anything else at the moment Please get up This is silly It means nothing at all.

Come on come on he continued after a moment in the steady comforting tone he had used for children about to be scratched, pricked or injected Come on Dido turn around I m not so terrible as all that!

She moved in a slow serpent like motion crossing her ankles, [illegible] oned and fitted the [illegible] of a tall leaf or a [illegible] said It is no use. I am accursed

Dido he said what are you saying? Why do you say that?

I can t help it she cried It s always this way—no matter what I do I am accursed It doesn t matter I don t care I'll go away

Wait a minute he said He went into the other room dialled a number and waited

Umberto s voice came over the line Dr Garth he said, they are asking about you

I know said Garth Umberto please tell Dr Stull that we ve been delayed We ll get there in a little while

He returned to the bedroom Come Dido he said stop *making such faces You don t want wrinkles do you?*

The sobs continued. He sighed That s what he had come back to Here under the grimace under the smeared make up in the wild maze of impure thoughts and grotesque ideas he was to seek the image of God

on

int

more harshly than he had intended And get up

She drank.

Here is a wet towel he said Wipe your f ce

She wiped her face

Cam

the freshness of the woods about him and felt against his face the scentless touch of the great fistfuls of periwinkles that he had

g

ler mouth half-opened and droopu g

He wanted me to come she said not as a question but in disbelief He wanted me and he sent you?

Why not? said Garth reason bly There seems to have been some sort of upset at Musurus this morning and Dad said he raised the roof there with everyone in s ght. But that s ove now Is that what you were worried about?

Dido shook her head brought her booted fe t over the edge of th bed and stood up No she said I don t care a darn what *happens at M surus ever gain I tried to ca e see I even tr ed to* learn Look there s the book I took out this morning and all I get for it is my fa pushed in I m through.

He took the bo k off the t bl and going into the living oom

he leafed through it But that s very good, he said. 'That s an excellent book to read. Maybe some of the terms will be a little difficult to understand at first if you ve not had physiology in school He thought I pass judgment on her and not three minutes later I am proved wrong Here is a gesture however tentative, toward grace There s much in it that makes good sense, that will prove useful to you in the future

She laughed briefly Oh no it won t she said.

He looked at her standing beside him. Closing the book, he rose. Ready? he said. Let s go

No she said I m not going

Don t you want to Dido? he said

I m going she said but not with you not where you re going Garth. But before I go—— Tell me she interrupted herself, what are you doing here anyway? I thought you were a priest, in a convent or something with a long black gown and a rope around your middle

I was he said seriously that is that s what I was studying for But it didn t work out.

And you ve returned? she said You re not a priest any more?

I never got to be a monk he said I was still on probation.

Like a student nurse before she gets her cap?

That s it, he said Like a student nurse

Weren t you good enough? she said Did you flunk? Is that why they sent you back?

Yes he said I wasn t good enough

Then what she said what is it going to be now?

I don t know he said I won t make any plans just now

Does that mean that Dave is out?

No he said Dave will remain.

Don t tell me she said I don t care It doesn t concern me any more

He leaned toward her and took her hand. Dido he said, don t say that You two have quarrelled haven t you and you are angry? Let it go away from you Don t keep scratching it like a rash. Whatever Dave said or did——

He slapped me she said He threw me against the wall and

hit my head. She took his hand and rubbed it in her hair Feel she said It is as big as an egg and it is sore

He was upset said Garth. I guess they were all upset Dad also said things he regretted He was embarrassed, cruelly embarrassed about it all He told me about it before Dave came in. That s why we should hurry back now to help them feel better

That s funny said Dido I don t care He hit me and made me dizzy And he hit me this morning too

Forget it said Garth. He was upset Everybody sometimes —

I don t care about that she said absently She bit her lips which were feverish and dry under the bright lipstick. I m not saying it s his fault I don t care what he does to me I love him, she said her forehead pressed into her hands If he beats me I don t care I can kick back. But it s wrong it s wrong she cried Don t you see how wrong it is for him to do that? If you are a priest—all right almost a priest—then oh what does it matter! You can t say to me your husband is wrong and you can t say to me you shouldn t have married him you should have known——

Because I knew it all the time You remember you were there you thought didn t you that it was wrong for him to marry me? I had floated about too much I tried to tell him that before It didn t matter when we were only sleeping together

But it did matter said Garth gently

Does it? Who else would he sle p with if not with a—you know what he called me today?

If you slept together said Garth, of course it was right to marry him

A fat lot you know about it said Dido Should a man marry every woman he sleeps with? Should he be a Mormon and keep fifty wives?

Don t said Garth quietly He married you That was the right thing for him to do and now the right thing for you Dido ——

Why? said Dido explosively Why was it right what was right about it? D d he seduce me? Was I an innocent babe o t of the woods? I wasn t I tell you He didn t seduce me I seduced him. It was easy I liked him He was handsome He is handsome isn t he?

Probably said Garth. But stop brooding about it. You're a young bride now not a fallen woman

That s what he married said Dido and sitting on the floor her white rubber boots crossed before her A fallen woman a lost woman The fool With all his education he had to make a mess of that Why a taxi driver would have better sense would know more than that

You know she said turning away from him as though he wasn t there at all as though it was someone else she spoke to someone sitting across from her under the table as though it was a tale remembered and retold to herself in wonder there was a girl at the Blitz Lorraine her name was She was cute a lot cuter than I and she had an affair with a guy in the bar He was a jerk His hair grew straight out of his eyebrows He was a drip Anyway she thought she was going to marry him she thought that would be a step up in the world I don t know why she liked him She got to be five months pregnant and no one knew it and she kept on dancing and then he told her He couldn t marry her his mother didn t want him to marry Did you get that? she said with a bitter laugh His mother his sainted mother didn t want him to marry the mother of his child!

So anyway there she was stuck and no one to take care of her And her mother was coming from down state with all kinds of clothes for the wedding She didn t show anything yet I don t know how she managed to dance in the stuff almost but nobody knew it Well anyway she wouldn t have anything done to her It was too late anyway to think about that it was alive by then, and she kind of liked it I used to kid her about it I was the only one who knew I used to say how is the Kickapoose? When are you getting rid of it? And she d say I m getting kind of attached to it. I ll keep it And so when it was time she went to the hospital. She was very pretty you know a lot prettier than I She was blonde and even when she was as big as a barrel, she was beautiful. And there the intern who took care of her—he was Jewish and very nice—he proposed to her so the baby would have a name—and he liked her well enough anyway Did I say she was pretty?

Yes said Garth And so they were marned and lived happily ever after

N

up—

He e

Gee

marry him You re in luck he wants you. Marry him you haven t got the choice stupid. She d had her baby by then you see But she wouldn t Even then She refused She said it wasn t his baby and she wouldn t saddle him with that She said—and I wasn t

D I I I

and he wishes that I were dead

What a silly thing to say said Garth and what a cruel thing to say about Dave If he hated you that much would he stay with you? What keeps him here if not that he loves you?

She groped toward him and rising on her knees looked into his eyes with *eyes that were sea ed nd lost with dry eyes from which* fear had gone with steady eyes that had looked into the pit and measured the distance to the bottom and found it equal to her purpose

Do you know what he said this afternoon when he came in? I was lying down I was praying I guess I wasn t pr ying to God she laughed. Don t get me wrong don t start rejoicing I haven t met the gentleman we ha en t been formally introduced——

Who were you praying to then? said Garth quietly

Mitsu said Dido I was praying to Mitsu.

Garth lifted her to her feet led her to the sofa and made her s t down Then he sat down beside her You ll have to tell me about Mitsu he said.

She s dead, said Dido She s the girl they killed this morning

Was she the aortic aneurysm case?

She s the girl who died. And they didn t care Nobody cared but me Because——

Yes? said Garth

Because in a way she was me you see. Because I was like her the girl nobody cared about Do you think I am pretty?

You are very pretty said Garth. Everybody thinks so

Well said Dido that s the only difference She wasn t even pretty She had buck teeth. She was a Jap or did you know?

I didn t know said Garth That doesn t make any difference. A patient is a patient

Is it! You mean the patient in the charity bed is as good as the one who pays thirty bucks a week? Excuse me, cried Dido in mock surprise what am I saying? Thirty bucks a day for the room only and then twice as much for the rest! Isn t thirty bucks a day more than nothing at all? Don t the nurses know it, and the superintendent and even the chief himself even Dr Taikkes

If the thirty-dollar a day patient has infected tonsils said Garth the physician in him rattling and flexing his muscles, and the charity ward man has infected tonsils the thirty-dollar a day man will get preference if there s a choice If the thirty-dollar man has bad tonsils and the charity case has leukaemia, the leukaemia patient gets preference every time no matter who the doctor is

That s so? said Dido mockingly You ve been out too long Brother Garth Things have changed since you went to school.

Human nature doesn t change said Garth. But where does that lead us? What about that girl that Japanese girl you were talking about?

Mitsu said Dido Yes so I was saying a prayer to Mitsu. That was all right wasn t it Since she is dead? I was lying down right here I was dressed she said with her quick, hiccupy laugh. I had my eyes closed And Dave came in and saw me He said What s the matter with you? You look like a corpse You know what corpse he was thinking about.

Well not necessarily said Garth But supposing that you are right supposing that he meant Mitsu——

Supposing? cried Dido You know very well it was He had just finished her hadn t he? He said of Mitsu—he said to me—he said of me Dido—he said—— She took his arm between her two hands and through the heavy winter stuff of his suit, he felt the narrow tipped fingers plunged into his flesh like the teeth of a retractor ——he said what s the difference if she lived or died! It didn t matter to him He didn t care a damn!

27

He threw open the window and stood there letting the cold wind divide around his face cap with icy breath his tonsured skull penetrate the heavy still unfamiliar clothes nd reach his skin at last purifying his body and his thoughts washing away the touch of her hand and the sight of her from his eyes

Lavabo inter innocentes m nus meas—Among the innocent I shall wash my hands——

In the monastery the evening service was begun Kneeling on the bare stone his brothers were free to fix the inward eye toward the Prisoner of the Altar I salute Thee Lord Host most g cious of the children of man I salute Thee beloved he ven given Hos tage forever watching over me Blessed art Thou by all that exist blessed by my heart which has selected Thee——

Sh was rummaging through her purses seeking a compact here a letter some coins the e rejecting and tearing papers stopping before photograph album then furiously tearing them up also

The snow in the streets had been crushed to a dull grey but the rooftops kept it bright cut into odd shapes nd patterns making a mode n mosaic under the low white sky reflecting the sky s reflections of the coloured lights of the city while through the heavy haze without stars the red ai pl ne signals bove the sky scrapers blinked altern tely without rhythm witho it substance unsynchron ed devoid of meaning like the lives of tho e who dwelt under these roofs O Lord he asked do you w nt n e to be one of these?

The words of th Superior came to his mind The praye of the l harisee he had said Was the Ph risee not a man also a man who did his best according to his understanding a man smug and

pompous yes but who seeking the right way had stopped at the obvious because of the weakness of his myopic eyes? Men of culture and money and background all things that were hard to shed and hardest of all to give up at last his own vanity

I gave up all I had but it was not enough.

Dido he said without turning come here

I can t she said I ve got to be going now He will be back soon.

She came to him tightening the belt of her coat and shivering beside him

It s so cold she said What are you looking at?

At all the lights inside these houses he said At all these homes and the people living in them. I think of all the sorrows hidden in each of these cubicles the worry about the children who do not come home about the debts unpaid about the people trying to think from whom to borrow the money they have spent, about the wives whose husbands are in the armies abroad or o board ship or unknown seas or flying untested planes about those who have cheated or stolen and are afraid to be found out, about the old men who wake up every morning with joints more painful and stiffer than the night before about the diabetics who lose their legs because of gangrene about all the men who face despair and ruin and the death of those they love And then I see you fighting your artificial fight Your husband doesn t l se as you wish to be loved magazine fashion You re not good enough for him or else he s not good enough for you I don t know which. all Does that make sense

m looking at me that way

c t dow

Dido Have you ever felt

your heart turn inside your chest

—ut audiam vocem laud s et enarrem univ ersa mirabilia tua—

Why don t you tell him Dido what you feel about him and what you feel about you? Isn t that why God gave you speech, that you may learn to know each other

I have slept with him for a year said Dido Shouldn t he know by now?

She closed the window I m going she said You may stay if you like

Won t you tell him where you re going?

The little choking sound again The strike of a match a puff of smoke How could I? she said I don t know myself. Good bye she cried I m going I have left.

All right he said I ll go with you.

You are nice she said even though you are crazy You are crazy aren t you They all say you are You are like me you haven t got any sense have you?

I think I have said Garth. Well where shall we go? Aren t you going to tell me

No she said, you d only tell Dave I am through with Dave Come I ll turn off the light and I have the keys—— But I don t need my keys any more! Wait she cried and flung the keys through the half-closed door and then pulled it shut He s going to be so terribly angry not only because I left but because we have left together! Are you sure you want to go with me? Somebody will tell him and it will be very ugly for you later

We won t worry about that, said Garth.

The elevator stopped at the main floor All right she said with a shrewd look on the small face which even now was still swollen and undone but if you get your face pushed in don t blame me I warned you

Garth signalled a taxi. You used to work at the Blitz, didn t you? Would you like to drop in there for a while?

No she said, not yet. They don t really get going until after the first show the dowdy show for the suburbs Let s try the Gallery Maybe we ll meet some people I know

The Gallery said Garth to the driver You know he said to Dido this is something I haven t done for so long I probably won t know how to act I used to be quite a jazz fiend years ago before I went into the army

Poor Garth, said Dido from her corner

Why do you say poor Garth?

Poor Garth she repeated I wish it was not you with me tonight But I don t like being alone and there s no one else I lost all my pals when I got married.

I am not complaining am I Why worry about me?

She didn t answer Tentatively she put her hand on his and squeezed it a little then withdrew it very quickly as though she had not meant it at all But what it was she had meant he wasn t sure of nor why she was sorry for him and he was afraid to ask.

A moment later they entered the Gallery going three steps below the street level two rooms so low-ceilinged that entering, he had to bend a little not to strike the doorsill with his forehead. H. nearly sickened at the rancid beer and smoke smells and the smell of dead perfume and unclean breath and fish fry while the girl on his arm breathed hard of the same air and suddenly her face was transformed with bright young pleasure The weight of her body lightened and she walked in springingly alive to a new rhythm so that he looked at her in amazement and wondered which of the two women he had seen that night was the real Dido

She threaded her way through the tables and the crowd of diners and drinkers climbed on a bar stool not caring that the seat on each side of her was taken and that there was no place for Garth, and put her elbows on the ledge He stood beside her fi hting the desire to vomit to throw up the bile and the hidden anger of his heart to vomit himself out of this horror ridden dive, away from the grey faces scarred by disease and worry and the brutal gluttony of the flesh and the sleeplessness of the acid nights of th. city Dizzy with revulsion he closed his eyes Then the noise he had not yet heard the cracked and raucous voices the forced laughter the grinding crooner of the juke box and the hundred rattles and crashes of the dishes and glasses struck his ear with the impact of excruciating pain He remembered the madness of the war noises the violence of the dive bombers the ear-rendi g shriek of the sirens the deafening explosions of grenades and of bombs and longed for their clean shat ering finality To steady himself he put his hand in front of him on the bar ledge The man sitting beside Dido turned and looked at him out of red-orbed eyes and winked. I ll move Mac You sit with your doll Heavily

arth sat on the stool and put his head in his hands Dido touched is elbow Wake up she said This is where the fun begins ive him a Scotch neat she told the bartender and I ll have a om Collins Buck up she told Garth again we ll get some ood. I d like to eat.

All right he said we ll eat but not here. Finish that drink and t s go elsewhere. Would you like the Plaza? he said racking his rain to find the forgotten names Would you like the Barberry oom or the Starlight Roof or Pavillon?

Right now I like it here she said If you don t like it why on t you go home? I think it s cute It s got atmosphere At what me did they put you to bed in your monastery?

He shrugged his shoulders As you like he said. We ll eat here you want to Let s find a table shall we?

Not yet she said I want to talk to him nodding toward ie bartender at the end of the bar I ve got to ask him about Iermana

His eyes followed her gesture and he looked at the man caught i his twelve-feet by three space wandering b ck and forth, pour ig drinks and taking away glasses his pale eyes sneering behind he double fold of yellow redundant skin his mouth tired and hard nder the threadlike moustache his hair greasy and flattened on he glossy scalp The man feeling his glance turned sharply to im Whatsa matter he said, do I have dirt on my face?

The lady wants to ask you something said Garth.

The man turned to Dido raised his eyebrows and looked back t Garth, smiling with so deliberate a smile that Garth felt his omposure leave him.

Okay he said at last and what is it, lady?

But Dido s voice was friendly Some pals of mine were here he said Most of the afternoon I guess at least he was A tall guy vith a funny face And the girl is real tall too real handsome with traight hair to here You must have seen them.

Yeah, he said I sure did.

When did they leave?

The bartender blinked and turned abruptly I got your order ie cried to the other end of the bar Hold your horses will yuh?

I got three hands only!—Yeah he said they were here all night He was with another couple of guys a marine was one of them guys Then that babe comes up and starts her routine. They had a hell of a good fight The customers liked it.

Did they make it up? asked Dido That s what I want to know

They made it up to the tune of nine dollars worth of drinks.

Where did they go? said Garth

Where did they go? repeated the barman Who wants to know anyway you or the lady Hostility exuded from him. Why wondered Garth what was I thinking of when he looked at me

Excuse me he told Dido I have a phone call to make

No you don t! she said You aren t to call Dave If you call Dave we re through

He had got up but he sat down again He touched his lips to the glass and put it down I ll find us a table he said.

The charged air of the room was becoming intolerable His head ached His mouth burned as in a fever He made his way to the front of the room where the opening door broke from time to time the pall of smoke that lay over the tables avoiding as he went the rasping glances of men and women and the boldly presented flesh piled high in the compression of the basketlike bodices like a bulbous and hideous harvest

He fell into a chair and picking up the menu, he joined his hands Do not turn Your face from me he prayed. If it is Your will I ll endure this gladly but do not leave me alone, because I am lost without You

I ll have the chicken Tetrazzini, said Dido s voice beside him. And some Chianti And garlic dressing for the salad What will you have?

I have had my dinner said Garth dully

You ll eat again said Dido Bring him spaghetti with anchovy sauce waiter And salad and some coffee That goes down easy

Drink? said the waiter to Garth

No drink, said Garth. The waiter shook some crumbs from the tablecloth and went away

Did you find out about your friends? asked Garth with effort.

He knows she said confidentially but he won t tell Not for nothing and I have no money

I am sorry said Garth I should have thought of it I ll take care of it

Pooh she said it doesn t matter I ll find them and if I don t—— she shrugged I know where they live anyway It really doesn t matter right now

The spaghetti was excellent the bread crusty and fresh and Garth was surprised to find himself eating again Dido was playing with her food talking and darting quick glances about her as though still hoping still waiting for Hermana She poured him some wine

No he said I am not used to drinking any more

Don t they ever drink out there? she asked I thought they made all the liqueurs in those houses You kno v Benedictine and Chartroos and all that sweet stuff

Not in this country he said It depends also upon the order

Garth she said why did you go in there?

He did not answer

Can t you tell me? I think I d understand I understand everything Was it because of a girl?

No he said it wasn t It s hard to explain In here especially

Why in here she asked. Why should it be harder in here than anywhere else? Who are you afraid of?

You are right said Garth surpri d I am afraid af aid to be laughed at

I wouldn t laugh at you she said I think it s fascinating

The word was a pail of water thrown into hi face

You v ould not understand he said ha shly It doesn t do any good to explain anyw y I went ther becau e it is a v y of life toward which I felt dr wn th t s all the e is to it

Okay she said I m dumb That s what Dave thinks too It isn t true but brother that doesn t bother me at all Most men feel that w y about m It s a gift She laughed

That isn t what I mean to say he said, his voice rising to cover the twittering crooner of the juke box.

She doesn t know about bees and flowers
She doesn t know about birds in the sprin
But she knows the one thing that matters——

I mean that it took me two years to figure out what it really meant to me to make up my mind and I can t tell you about it in five minutes

Do you believe in hell? she asked Really believe in hell where people get broiled over and over again without ever stopping?

Look he said I can t tell you about it now

But she insisted Tell me she said, do you really believe in that?

It s not quite the way you put it he said But on the whole, yes I do

She drew her chair closer to his so that her elbow now was pressing into his

You re a smart guy she said You ve gone throu h years and years of school haven t you Garth? And I didn t finish high school even So you probably know and I don t. No she said don t look at me like I was an idiot child I am an itsy bitsy drunk but I am serious as hell about this I want to know If I was to die tonight if I was to jump from the tallest window I could find——

Dido he said you re not that drunk Don t say these silly things People who jump out of windows are stupid people hard-boiled people inside people without imagination without interest in anybody

That s what you think she said her eyes glistening with a secret joy of her own but that isn t the point If I were to die let s say just for the fun of it would I go to hell forever?

Nobody can tell who goes to hell and who doesn t, he said. No man can ever pass judgment.

But I might mightn t I?

It s a possibility he said wearily

And suppose—— she stopped looked down at her hand contracted on the table so that the tablecloth was gathered and puckered under her nails and then she forced her fingers flat and was silent a moment. Garth waited

Suppose she said her voice casual and poised that a woman who was pregnant was to kill herself would the baby go with her too?

> I told her about bees and the flowers
> And now she s out with a brand new guy

Dido he said are you going to have a baby?

You are crazy she said violently What has that to do with m[illegible] Dave?

[illegible] if you [illegible] talk to me?

I don t want your help she said But you might answer any way I just asked a question that s all, and I don t care what the answer is But you might answer just to be polite

Let s get out of here he said Let s get out in the air and walk a bit We ll both feel better then you ll see

But don t you see it doesn t matter she said with her bright confidential smile. Can t you see that it wouldn t make any difference really one way or the other?

It appears said Taikkes replacing the phone in its cradle that your wife has left your bed and board Temporarily that is Does she play that sort of trick often?

What? said Dave What do you mean? Left me? Who Dido?

How many wives do you own?

How do you know? Who was that Dido?

Calm down Dave said Taikkes She s all right. Just woman stuff As you progress in your married life you ll learn to take these storms with a grain of salt. She s all right, don t worry Garth s got her in p otective custody He ll bring her back by and by calmed down and unkissed. I guarantee it. He s always been good at that sort of thing

I d better go said D ve, his face wo king I d better go get her Where is she? What ar they doing?

They are touring the night clubs said Taikkes I didn t get

the name of the place Roland s or Marquand, or something Eventually they ll land at the Blitz Garth thinks You might pick her up there later on For heaven s sake sit down will you You make me dizzy running around like a lion in his cage. What did you do to her what does she mean, running off like that?

I don t know said Dave We quarrelled. We argued last night about that Japanese woman as I told you. I told her about it, like the triple fool that I am and of course—she has no understanding of hospitals and cases—she went all out for the girl. She didn t want me to touch her if you weren t there and I was pretty sure you wouldn t be

She didn t want you to touch her did she said Takkes. Well well well And fought about it?

And fought about it said Dave dully And Dr Takkes he said man to man tell me the truth. You say—and I know—that she would have died anyway and I know also whatever you felt this morning about it now you re not angry any more But was I wrong?

Takkes drew a chair beside Stull and sat down He pulled a piece of paper toward him and aimlessly started drawing a diagram, the pattern of the heart with its four chambers

You did your best

He looked at the clock At what time did the show begin what was his son doing now on this first evening they should have spent together

You did your best he said If you succeed you re right. If you don t you re wrong

Dave s hands moved

No he said don t defend yourself Dave It s not a question of right and wrong in this one case It isn t even a question of how good you are You re good you re plenty good enough, you re better than I was at your age But that isn t it The point is—

Yes said Dave what is the point exactly?

The point is continued Takkes how much fuel do you bring to your job? Everything? Everything you have? Every time? If you don t you aren t good enough nobody s good enough unless he is better than the job demands Unless he s too big for the job

he isn t big enough I ve been saying this for forty years and I haven t found a single man to believe me If the job is worth while t will be ennobled by the man but the man if he is small will ever be ennobled by the job Do you understand that?

No said Dave to be frank I don t The job s one thing the nan another

Wrong said Taikkes pulling himself away from his drawing and then adding with short repeated strokes the corona of blood essels around the heart like the hair of the Medusa The man must be big must be immense to do a small thing memorably ach case you get does not end for you with the recovery or the death or the dismissal of the patient You ve done one of two hings one good the other bad When you touch a man if it is vith dull insensitive hands and you hurt him unnecess rily if you et hold of an acute belly and palpate it to the point of tenderness hat patient will remember It will go on living in his flesh the fear and distrust of you the dislike of you But if you are not con emptuous of his carcass of its seams and its scars of the scales of us psoriasis of his whole body maybe gummy with pus maybe tinking with gangrene maybe only goose pimpled and sweaty vith fear if he feels that through the caricature of his body he can each you you not only the doctor but the man then you are doing your job you re doing it well And that s what you must do very time every time you hear me Dave every time no matter vhat the colour whether black or yellow o white——

Wait a minute said Dave Wait Are you trying to say that I layed around with that wretched woman bec use she was a Jap?

I didn t say that said Taikkes

Because I didn t said D ve with force I thought I d fix her all ight. And if I couldn t well what chance did she have anyw y? And I don t want to muff my other cases the good ones those who an pull through That s why I took the woman on even though ou were not there I can t care about each individual I care about ny work. And you do too

Wh t about the woman? said Taikkes. How about that oman s kids and that woman s b other? You know vhen you poke about your life just now what I was thinking? I was thinking

of Mitsu s brother this morning when I told him that she was dead. He wanted to go to her right away as though there was still time, she had died to recently He was saying it s my sister it s my sister, with the same tone of voice you had with the same amazed look

So that s it said Dave in a deaf voice That s it You think I don t care that I hoopla d myself into that girl s chest like a damned med school freshman into his first cadaver That s what you think I made you say it twice and I still don t believe it I don t believe anyone would think that of me that I d be that dull, that crass——

That s idle talk said Taikkes Whatever your intentions—

My intentions were to find out for myself Every damn one of us with a MD to his name has done the same thing If he hasn t, he s no doctor You ve done it too in your youth I d swear you have I d swear to heaven you have If you and I couldn t take a chance all we d be good for in a hospital would be shaving the old boys before their suprapubic and pushing in the enemas.

The Chief shook his head slowly

What a fool you are Dave he said not unkindly How much you still have to learn!

He picked up the paper with its doodling and tore it in four parts and threw it in the direction of the wastepaper basket. One piece of it with its crudely drawn auricle hit the edge of the basket and fell to the floor He looked at it absently and turned again to his assistant with a sigh Dave s face was drawn and hard

Don t look at me that way he said You re an emotional idiot that s all not a mental idiot And I am one too but in the opposite direction There s more hope for me than for you though even if I am an old man

I don t understand you said Dave

It doesn t matter if you do or if you don t said Taikkes. We ll have lots of time to work it out together You will have to learn to curb yourself and put up with me You will be forced to profit from my experience and value it Since you re to go on working with me I ll pour every bit of knowledge I have down your throat and you ll have to keep it down And you will have to learn to chew down your pride and swallow that too I know I seem

arrogant. I am not I ll admut to you and to everyone else who asks that the guy who botched that job this mornung——

I botched it said Dave If that s what you want me to say

I botched it said Taikkes Because I cared even less than you did. You were there at least and I was not But this mornung—— his voice shook this mornung is over he went on as though speaking to himself The nightmare is over for me For you it is different We d better start thinking about tomorrow s case——

You ll do the surgery then said Dave trying to be casual

No said Taikkes You ll do it but by heaven if I m late you ll wait you hear me! You won t start the anaesthesia until you see me in the scrub room If I m good enough to do the assisting you ll be good enough to wait for me But you won t have to I ll be there

Just then the phone rang again

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ON THE screen Rita curled made-up and eyelashed stood with her back to the door her hand to her throat her face turned a little, listening to sounds of footsteps in the hall In the darkness of the room the glancing lights from an illusory window struck alternately her dilated eyes her outstretched hand and, in the corner of the room, just within her reach the pearl handled revolver She hesitated gracefully holding the pose for eight seconds Then she made a dash seized the revolver pointed it at the door and shot twice

Dido s head moved a little beside Garth. She turned toward him. Dave she said I fell asleep I dreamed—— She sat up

Where are we? she whispered What has happened?

They ve found her he said, but she s burned the documents and Jim has called the FBI It s a good movie, you should watch.

She laughed and people in the row in front of them turned around angrily The FBI? she said Why then, let s get out before they get here Somebody is bound to get hurt You wouldn t want me to see it would you?

Garth rose picked up her bag and coat and followed her down the aisle to the entrance of the theatre He glanced at his watch. A quarter to eleven Well he said standing in the foyer where to now? Is the Blitz going full force yet? Is the spinster s show over?

Just about she said We might give it a try See if any of the old girls are still there How do I look, Garth?

Like a bad child who should be sent home to sleep he said. You couldn t look worse Go wash your face and put on a fresh one But I should take you home You don t seem awfully steady to me

I am very steady she said I m as steady as a rock. Wait until

you see me really sozzled. You ll regret the day Okay then wash your face Dido She took her purse from his hands What Dave calls the instrumentarium she said and disappeared down the staircase

Quickly Garth found a phone again. He was emerging from the [illegible]

up to him like a good little girl?

Better he said dubiously Where to now?

I don t know she said Around Let s push off to Broadway and see what s going on for a while I am good for you am I not Garth?

The outside air struck sharply at his nostrils How do you mean? he said

I make you catch up on a whole season of night clubs and stuff that you ve missed. I m putting you back in the groove You ought to be grateful

I am he said seriously With you it s perfectly safe

She made a face That s not nice Garth she said That s downright insulting really How do you mean safe? How do you know what I might do to you?

He shuddered in boredom at all the idiocies he had to hear and say at the strain of bending his mind to the vapid speech She was even duller than Lillian but Lillian hid it better under the cover of long words

Perhaps I should be on the lookout he said speaking with shame Perhaps you ll put knock-out drops in my drink.

That s it said Dido that s the way I operate slick and easy

Slick and easy she repeated Ga th aren t you having fun at all?

I m out of the hab t he said I don t remember how

She stopped befo another movie house examined the stills at length and went on

Where would you rather be? she asked Honestly I mean. You wouldn t rath r be lying down on your plank in the monast ry would you?

That s where I belong he said But that s over for me now

Are you sorry?

I don t feel anything ye 1 L ~ rf!
like a man who wakes up
but he doesn t feel the pain
believe it

That s funny she said her eyes bright, that s just the way I feel Garth my ears hurt it s so cold. Give me your muffler will you?

He pulled it off and wound it about her head tying it in a rough knot under her chin There he said little cousin from the Old Country does that feel better?

Yes she said It s warm It feels good. Let s walk a bit, but don t make me run You take such long steps!

How about a taxi?

I don t want a taxi she said This way I can hang on to you. In a taxi you wouldn t even hold my hand would you?

He looked down at her and smiled

No she said I guess you wouldn t

It isn t fun at all she said sadly after they had walked a little while in silence It isn t fun to be out with a man who doesn t even pretend You hate the sight of me don t you?

I like you very much, he said and I like Dave And each of you can only be happy with the other so why——

That isn t true she said violently It isn t true at all He doesn t love me and I am not happy with him. You ve got it all wron And when something is wrong you tear it out of yourself and throw it away That s what they say in the Bible you go by

She pulled her arm away from him looking strai ht ahead of her with an air of challenge and almost of triumph. And waiting thought Garth to be disproved by him. But his heart was empty and he felt tired and irritated condemned as he was to talk to this five year old He was yearning now for silence and the company of men

She walked before him rapidly crossing the street with no regard to traffic or to lights a car screeching as she ran in front of it, and

Garth helpless on his side of the street saw the driver lean out and scream something at her but she ran on without pause

Like a five year-old he thought or worse like a stupid un broken dog Doesn t love open the mind at least if it fails to open the heart?

He crossed the street rapidly and caught up with her

I should put you on a leash he said since you haven t sense enough to watch the traffic

She laughed

Let th tr ff [illegible]

[illegible] streets are covered with ice

It could be very nasty indeed and cause a lot of broken ribs he told her And dreadful when you take a breath you know

No more breaths to take she said. Mitsu s chest was broken but she doesn t hurt now It hurts before not after

I think, he said pulling her firmly from the roadway that you re trying to punish Dave in your mind because he couldn t save that girl That isn t fair you know My father might have failed.

That isn t it at all she said, I m not punishing Dave. I m giving him a break

'You re planning the worst thing a woman can do to a man he said. Dese ting him is proving to him that he isn t good enough.

Is that the worst thing?

Yes said Garth, and then bit his lip because he heard her answer even before she spoke it

That s just what he is doing to me.

The wind blew hard bout them flapping the edge of the scarf in her face. Like a child. He drew it down gently tucked it into the collar of her coat.

We ll take a taxi he said. Pneumonia is painful.

They had to wait a few minutes taking a few steps from time to time to reawaken the circul tion in their feet. Garth was taut with cold. He regretted in earnest the deep wool hood which yesterday

covered his tonsured skull The sharp night air froze his breath inside his nostrils A cab drew up at last and he gave the driver Dave s address

No! she cried I told you I won t. Just keep going driver until we tell you to stop

He brought down the flag with a back handed flip Okay he said uptown downtown?

I don t care said Dido Just keep your window closed.

She spoke to Garth without looking at him her face a white blur in the darkness of the cab and her voice held back a moan.

What s the matter with me Garth? People used to like me. Honest they did. Why is it nobody loves me any more?

He forced himself to speak, trying to hide the tired contempt of his voice You don t need make-believe love Dido You need your husband You were not a child when you married and Dave knew what he was doing Both of you made a promise You made it honourably you meant to keep it. Keep it Dido don t play games

I am unhappy she whispered

I know he said That s part of it too there are moments of loneliness and sorrow in every marriage. You must learn to accept the whole of marriage not only trimmings If you really love Dave and I think you do And even if you don t, if you ve forgotten how to love

I love him she said in the same toneless voice but I ve lost him now I am alone I don t know what to do

You do know You need to look into yourself Dido And start right now She turned to him and looked into his face for a moment with a sort of eager curiosity Then she smiled with detachment with irony a smile that did not become her face which made it old and hard and shrewd. She straightened up

To the Blitz driver she said and stared mutely into the dark ahead while Garth from his corner felt he had spoken awkward and irreparable words

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EVER SINCE she had arrived at the Blitz she had tried to get rid of Garth to push him back into his own life and out of hers Now she was among her own and after helping her from one end to the other of the bridge his usefulness to her had ended but he had refused to leave In a way she was not displeased He fitted although he was not in evening clothes into the image of herself she wanted to make not for other people s eyes but for her own In another sense he was the rope she still could grasp if in some way she did not want to foresee the nightmare was to end and she could cross that night unharmed

He was still with her in the fantastic play of coloured shadows and of lights thrown from the shallow stage before which passed over and over again the agile platoons of waiters brandishing the covered dishes and their trays of glasses like weapons threatening but withheld Caught in the amorphousness of packed bodies so that they hardly knew each other from the mass crowded compactly into their seats against the wall to the right of the stage they spoke to each other from time to time and with Hermana nd Nome across from them At times there were other people who came up and spoke to her and then Hermana left and the others males [illegible]

had ev[illegible]

someti[illegible]

expanding and contracting heads

He was beside her Garth who had found her that evening after the other one had left the other one who was the real one in spite of the sharp elbow against her own now—the other one who was not Garth, not Jimmy nor Harold but D ve Dave was the one who mattered and the one who mattered was not there But Garth

who was there was not there as Garth any more and that was a relief Because with Garth you had to explain everything even the simplest things and that was difficult and impossible and at times shameful But Garth did not work like the other ones did, at least like the others did in the beginning and the beginning was always the same thing it was the end which always turned out wrong No matter what it is you work on it is the end that matters and the end is always the same really just as the beginning had been. The end was always Dido alone and the other one dead. Dead in Korea like Harold who had been the kindest or dead in her heart like Jimmy who had robbed her and left—and really he had been the nicest of all the one who loved her the most Or dead for her like Dave since Dave had said clearly without even being asked that he did not care if she lived or died She and Mitsu, or both or the whole world as far as that was concerned so lon as he did wha he liked Or dead like Garth shaven for the coffin who had no love for her who had no words for her now thinking she was too far gone to understand or that nothing he could say would ever make sense to her But it made sense of course no matter how drunk she was she would get drunk if she pleased but when you are as sore as she was you could never get drunk enough, drunk enough to pass out Not sore in the way of being mad, although she was mad too but sore in every part of her body that nobody wanted sore all the way to that new part of her which was not alive yet not alive to her but alive to itself that she could not feel and which also was unwanted and lonely with the terrible loneliness of the unborn the unborn to life or the unborn to love the loneliness which has no voice yet no name no bitterness of its own but which is already rejected and condemned to die

Garth was here but it did not count any more he couldn t save them She had fought it out against him and won in spite of all his words because he had none of the real words that would miraculously make well all of her soreness Jimmy the thief would have known how to celebrate the ripening of a child within her—how much laughter they had laughed the day before the girl from the Blitz had gone to the hospital to have her baby! What a day and a night they had had the three of them with the guest of

honour feasted and toasted and loved! But Garth had no joy in him no hope for himself or for anyone else he knew the rules and that s all he knew You must do this you must not do that—what did he know about the must that mattered? She had succeeded in holding him back in taking back her own words to him, she had annoyed him and made him mad and pushed him around and away from what he wanted to know from what she had almost let him guess which he now discounted and forgot and could no longer reach for It was over It had been very close but it was over and he couldn t wrench any part of it out of her any more since now there was that huge wall of sound between the two of them this Niagara of dance music hurled at them by the trumpets and the saxes and the piano players and the words which had hung inchoate on the edge of her lips could now be said in the great blindness of dark and unfocused light in the palpable shroud of smoke and never get across never be heard

I am going to have a baby and Dave doesn t know Dave doesn t want a baby from me and if he doesn t want my baby he doesn t want me and both of us must get killed so he can get away from us so he can marry his own kind of woman the kind he d want his baby from. And I love him and I love him well enough for that

The great blur at her side contracted into shape and became Garth.

What was that? he said in her ear what was it you said? What was it about Dave?

She pushed back his f ce away from her

I am raving she said. Can t you tell Doctor when a girl is drunk? But the f ce came b ck at he slashed with the cri scross of red-green lights from the stage came back err tically like a toy balloon at the end of a string hard to aim at too slick to hold away

If there is a baby you must stop drinking Dido You mustn t get drunk you ll kill the b by D do you ll kill the baby——

You ll kill the baby Dido you kill the b by kill the b by Dido kill the baby——

You could kill the baby and live Live without the b by I don t

who was there was not there as Garth any more and that was a relief Because with Garth you had to explain everything even the simplest things and that was difficult and impossible and at times shameful But Garth did not work like the other ones did, at least like the others did in the beginning and the beginning was always the same thing it was the end which always turned out wrong No matter what it is you work on it is the end that matters and the end is always the same really just as the beginning had been. The end was always Dido alone and the other one dead. Dead in Korea like Harold who had been the kindest or dead in her heart like Jimmy who had robbed her and left—and really he had been the nicest of all the one who loved her the most Or dead for her like Dave since Dave had said clearly without even being asked that he did not care if she lived or died She and Mitsu, or both or the whole world as far as that was concerned so long as he did what he liked Or dead like Garth shaven for the coffin who had no love for her who had no words for her now thinking she was too far gone to understand or that nothing he could say would ever make sense to her But it made sense of course no matter how drunk she was she would get drunk if she pleased but when you are as sore as she was you could never get drunk enough drunk enough to pass out Not sore in the way of being mad, although she was mad too but sore in every part of her body that nobody wanted sore all the way to that new part of her which was not alive yet not alive to her but alive to itself that she could not feel and which also was unwanted and lonely with the terrible loneliness of the unborn the unborn to life or the unborn to love the loneliness which has no voice yet no name no bitterness of its own but which is already rejected and condemned to die

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It was hard to speak and keep her jaw from shaking Give me my coat I m cold.

He got up with her You stay here she said You can t come with me

He was following her out of the room You are ill he said I ll get someone——

I m all right she said Leave me alone I know my way

She laughed. She had to laugh for him This is home to me I want to go backstage and see the kids She didn t dare look at him Is Dave coming? Not because she wanted to know She knew She just had to say his name once more the last word to anyone, the only message Is Dave——

Yes he said, of course He ll be here in a moment He loves you—— She turned away holding her mouth tight closed over his name Hold it close Dido And hurry They won t let you, but it is the best way It s the only way the best best for him for Dave He loves you. Let him love me always like this with no reminder of me no more quarrels no shame no family just a foolish show kid who didn t know how to love him better than this——

The woman in the lounge was very nice and after she had been s ck, she made her lie down and put cold towels on her forehead. She was a new matron here Dido had not seen her before but she was kind and called her honey and smiled t her It felt good to lie the e in the brightly lit air-conditioned room with the chatter of the girls putting on make up in the powder room and he was tempted when she closed her eyes tempted for a very short while just a very short while to keep them closed and let go and fall asleep and let him find her when he came And then everything would be all right gain She hadn t done anything wrong she hadn t harmed the b by had she? She had got rid of all the drinks inside her so that was all right still she could go b ck——

What s the matter honey said the matron the grey haired matron, so round so clean so peaceful with he quiet wide-sp ced eyes what s the matter hon who s making you cry?

I m not crying said D do I m all right now I better be going

She had to do it now She couldn t go back to him, that was plain. He had made it plain She didn t belong to his life. His life was with other people nice people like Garth like Taikkes like the woman in the hospital who had picked out a book on babies for her She Dido belonged here among the soiled people with soiled lives hiccupy lives which start after dark, where throwing up the drinks was routine for the girls the smart ones that is, and routine also the jovial men in the strange beds

But I didn t do it Dave It was just a joke I didn t mean anything by it

And where the best that could happen was a grey haired woman in the washroom putting cold towels on your face as though you belonged to her

I ll be going now she said I m sorry Mom, that s not much change That s all I have

That s okay said the woman You take good care of yourself, honey Some other time I ll be seeing you

She slipped out into the foyer No she thought, I even cheated her There won t be some other time There ll be some other girl but there won t be me *Oh Dave if I see you now I'll die!*

But he wasn t in the foyer Maybe he was in already with Garth, waiting for her Maybe he wasn t coming at all for her Maybe he was dumping her on to Garth to do what he wanted with her to find a way to rid himself of her

But he loved her Garth said so that was the last thing he had said He loved her She would think that every minute of the way out so she had the strength for what she had to do slide in the dressing room now empty because the new show had started and out of the hall to the fire escape where she had so often gone out for a smoke between acts out into the blistering cold air up the iron rungs where the snow was crusty and old hanging on to the rough rusted banister because the steps were high—to the second floor past the men s dressing rooms and stop for breathing because the air was so sharp it beat inside her like a cocktail shaker and up again to the third flight above the street, on the level with the roof of *the restaurant next door* but not high enough—past

the storerooms where the props were kept and the band instruments and here there was no light and it was eerie going up like this in the dark and the fifth floor up and stop again and now over to the roof easy now there was the ledge this was hard to manage with high heels she didn t want to fall just yet it was so cold, it was horribly cold but she would wait one minute longer just to think a moment more just to make sure it was the right moment and be braced——

And not a word to him not a line nothing She would leave him like this without letting him know that she had not cheated that she had really tried that whatever she had done was the best she knew how—that there w s no use trying it again she was all wrong for him that s all he had made a mistake in picking her just as he had made a mistake in picking Mitsu It wasn t her fault and it hadn t been Mitsu s but Mitsu was better off dead that s what he said and so was she But Mitsu had had it easier a lot easier she hadn t seen herself die

The parapet was low and she knelt in the snow so she wouldn t

[illegible] y She d never have the courage to fall that long and not know whether it would hurt or whether she would die before she d hurt Not so very far to go not too long to hit bottom but far enough high enough And so horribly cold now that her breath was rattling in her mouth and her knees were numb

I L

arc

oh

If [illegible] am doing is wrong let t be right for him help him make Garth help him help my Dave And help me too God don t let it hurt——

Her face was stiff with frozen tears She got up dragging her numbed feet and she stamped them hard on the iced flat roof She looked around he in the da k He footsteps were marked on the snow and the th ught came to her to write his name there on all that whiteness his name with hers Carefully she walked to the

middle of the roof and with her finger drew a large heart and inside it like a child on a beach, she wrote his name and hers. Dave she wrote in big letters and in smaller letters because there wasn t much room Dido

And then stumbling she ran toward the ledge

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I VE BEEN looking all over for you!

But I have been here for half an hour and I didn t see you said Dave Garth where were you sitting?

Last table to the right said Garth. Come and sit with me Dido will be back in a moment Why she must have passed right in front of you to go out. She might have touched you

I didn t see her said Dave dully He sat down and pushed away from him the lipstick stained glass and the ash tray in which her cigarette was still smouldering What a day he said What a sickening ghastly day! Only good thing—you are here

Yes said Garth

And now this thing with Dido I can tell you this he said with a jerky attempt at laughing No matter what Dido has told you about me she told the truth I ve behaved like a garage hand of a Saturday night I think I—I think I struck her

She didn t talk much said Garth She doesn t want to talk

Dave waved the waiter away I don t want anything he said Get the check. We re leaving

This is mine said Garth I ll take c re of it

Sorry said Dave My party My wife he thought My p ty not yours Aloud he said I ppreciate your looking after he like this She has funny moods at times I well I don t think I always undertsand. I am glad you were he e

Yes said Garth again Then fter a moment You struck her?

Yes said Dave She sked for it She ctually—well not literally of course—she asked for it She fabricates you know sh

with those tall stories—I should have seen through it. I m damned sorry now but I just let go I guess I don t understand women very well do I?

Probably not said Garth

But should I? Should men understand women? Is that what they want? Sometimes I think they do sometimes I think no they don t That it is better men shouldn t understand women. What would you have then if you all had the same type of sensibility? A Women s Auxiliary a Y W C A

Hardly said Garth

Well anyway said Dave it s done and over I hope She will grow up She must all right all right he added in answer to Garth s inquisitive look, perhaps I shall too But it has been an awful day That woman this morning and your father Garth

Are you operating tomorrow? said Garth I d like to look in.

Be glad to have you said Dave You ought to get your hand back in Haven t you missed it Garth in all these months?

Not once said Garth

I don t get it said Dave If I thought I couldn t get back to surgery that I couldn t enter the operating room again never have the feel of the scalpel in my hand and the patient there scrubbed and doped—and the feel of that first incision when you are about to push aside the curtain and see in actuality what you have felt should be there—the blue domed cyst, the intussuscepted bowel, the CA of the lung—why I don t know what I would do I d be lost I think.

You love it don t you? said Garth.

Yes said Dave I love it

It s your whole life said Garth That s natural. But Dido—

What about Dido? said Dave What s on your mind? Come on out and say it Where the devil is she anyway?

She said she was going backstage to talk to her friends, said Garth. She ought to be back any time now She was quite drunk, I think, Dave

I m not surprised said Dave drily I don t blame her I gave her a hell of a time

You love your work, said Garth with effort and the way you

feel about it, that s the way I suppose that she feels about you. There is nothing else

Well, said Dave that s fine that s the way it should be I don t mean that I love my work more than I like her That s a stupid comparison There is no comparison to be made there My work that s me I can t think of myself aside from surgery any more but Dido well she s my wife That s all

You believe that she loves you?

Yes of course Don t you? Then he repeated Don t you? as though seized and possessed by the lancinating thought What did she say to you how did she act? What did she say?

Don t be an ass Dave said Garth wearily If you don t know the depths—no wait he said seeing Dave about to speak, his face red with anger and denial if you don t know the violence with which she has rejected herself for love of you then indeed you are dull you are lacking in understanding and you need to stop being yourself and consider and search your motives and her needs Love he said raising his voice above the din of the saxes which were starting again their throbbing cacophony love is not enough Even for God love is not enough How could it be enough for Dido?

She did say something then said Dave controlling himself What did she tell you? Out with it since you know it all since you unde stand it so well

She was drunk, said Garth and she wasn t talking to me I think She was talking to herself and didn t know she was speak ing She thinks she is pregnant Dave and thinks you don t want her baby

P egnant! cried Dave and a man at the table beside them turned and pointed them out to his woman and they laughed Pregnant did you say? Go on don t be silly That s not it that s another tale She s trying to make herself interesting Pr gnant she couldn t be—that is—— Where the devil is she? he said standing up Thi is taking t o long and the girls are on the stage again Come Ga th let s go backstage and find her

The croon r sitting on the props in the wings was filing his fingernails while he waited for his cue. From a distance in his

checked sports jacket his face vibrant with luminous grease paint under the golden hair and straw hat he seemed only nineteen or twenty But the teeth were false and the neck, in the opening of the shirt was lined and taut and the lids were bruised by forty years of late nights

No he said in his warm young voice no I didn t see anyone. A girl? No just the biddies who re on stage now Sorry boys, come again

Awkwardly they pushed on to the dressing room. The door was open and the wall was lined with mirrors above a make-up shelf that ran along the entire length of the room The shelf was crowded with overnight cases overflowing with make-up jars tubes boxes and bottles and the floor was strewn with quickly discarded clothing that a coloured maid pale in a grey uniform was picking up and folding slowly

A girl? she said straightening up and rubbing her back with her free hand No nobody new Just our people around that s all. They don t often come in here the customers I mean

She used to be one of your girls said Dave harshly She used to dance and sing here You should know her Dido

Sure I know Dido said the woman her face lightening with a smile You wouldn t be her husband would you now?

Yes said Dave

Garth said We seem to have lost her somewhere around here. Do you know where she might be?

In there probably said the woman gesturing to the women s lounge You better ask the matron in there. I just take care of this room and it s enough of a job for me any day with these brats just throwing their things around She bent once more and picked up a bra Sometimes I wonder she said where they all come from and what kind of home they all had before they came in here. She turned to Dave You go in there. Just call for the matron. Mrs Hansen her name is and real nice She ll find her for you, don t you worry

Mrs Hansen! called Dave from the door of the women s lounge Mrs Hansen I ve come to look for my wife Dido Have you seen her?

I don t know anyone by name said the woman I m new here. If you tell me what she looks like——?

She is about that tall said Dave gesturing dark and thin She had a Persian lamb coat——

No said Garth. She wore a light wool coat a polo coat with a belt.

What? said Dave in surprise She didn t wear her fur coat?

No said Garth She wore a polo coat no hat. She nearly froze all evening

That s like her said Dave Well is she in here?

She was said the woman Nice youngster poor kid She was real sick. I took care of her and she got over it. She lay down for a while and after a bit she got up and went. She gave me all she had in her bag The woman fingered some coins in her apron pocket. It wasn t much she said but she gave it all.

The two men were out of the lounge before she finished speaking

Where on earth? muttered Dave Where could she have gone?

Garth returned to the dance floor and scrutinized it slowly Not in there he said Not at the table anyhow although it is hard to see from here

I'll ask the doorman said Dave He ought to know

No sa d the doorman a huge Negro resplendent in gold braid. No suh, I ain t seen no single lady leavin o t of heah. No single lady leaves out of heah tonight. We se respectable Our ladies comes with escorts he added with a laugh which made his teeth shine in a tip-provoking manner Except our own gals of course and they ain t out yet.

She was one of the Blitz girls at one time said Garth. Could she have slipped by you without being noticed?

I ain t moved from here fo the last coupl hours said the man We re real busy tonight and I ain t moved f om here. He opened the door and looked up and down the street Nobody s been out of here, he epeated without my noticing He closed the door It sure is f eezing ha d he said and more of the s m tom rrow

They retraced their steps slowly

I ll call home said Dave She might be there That fellow knows nothing She is at home worrying about me

I don t think so said Garth. I don t think she is at home

Dave stopped beside the telephone booth and turned squarely on Garth. I don t think you ve been much help he said. Why shouldn t she be at home? Why don t you think so?

She had no intention of returning home said Garth. When she left she threw the keys through the door She left you, Dave

Dave remained immobile and staring

I don t think so he said finally I don t think she left me She was just talking wasn t she Garth?

Garth made a gesture of evasion. I don t know he said. I didn t think so either The only thing——

What?

The coat said Garth Why did she leave the fur coat?

[illegible] She would have taken

[illegible] ive you kept from me?

[illegible] u saving until you find

the right [illegible]

Nothing said Garth I didn t say anything about that because when you d be here I d get out and let you two fight it out alone and I didn t think she meant it But about the baby——

Let s get going! said Dave Where the devil has she gone to?

We might get the house detective aid Garth. He d find out.

Yes suh said the Negro doorman, coming across the lobby it sure is getting cold and draughty in here He walked to the fire escape door and banged it shut. Some people never know how to close a door he said. No wonder we re all freezing in heah. He stood beside Dave You ain t found the lady yet suh? he said She might have left with another party suh?

Go to hell said Dave violently and observed with irritation Garth s apologetic gesture Well you would have seen her wouldn t you a girl in a polo coat?

I don t know said the black sullenly you said a girl alone! I didn t see no girl alone but I never mind what the ladies wear. They wear all kinds of clothes around heah. But polo coats—no, I guess I didn t see any

Thanks said Garth. If you see one take your time about finding a cab Detain her We ll be around He slipped the man a bill.

All right said the man I guess I can manage that all right

Dave returned from the card room wiping his forehead Not there either he said. Curse this place! I wish this was over When I find her——

Please said Garth remember that pregnancy or even the fear of pregnancy sometimes brings about a psychic upset——

The devil you say said Dave sarcastically Is that what they teach you in the monastery?

If you wish me to leave I ll go said Garth. I am anxious to go anyway I d like to go to early Mass in the morning and it s nearly two o clock now

I am sorry said Dave I didn t mean that at all Garth I m nearly crazy with worry She s right here within these four walls and we can t find her That s crazy isn t it?

You don t think said Garth that she might——

Might what?

I don t know I am just imagining said Garth but the way she felt?

Well what do you mean? Might have borrowed somebody s clothes and be out there in the line?

No said Ga th I wasn t thinking that. I guess we d better call the house detective after all

You mean—— said Dave Listen there must be a back door to this joint a fire escape or something

The fire escape said Garth Why the doorman just pushed it to a minute ago It was aja ——

Together the two men turned and re ched the door opened it wide and looked out Together they s w the broken cy crust on the steps They stopped fraction of second to tudy the small footprint then w th a cry of angui h Dave ta ted up two by two on the iron staircase and stumbled at last on to the snow covered roof

Dido! he cried softly at first in choked voice and then louder with all the force of his lungs D do! Dido! Dido!

Garth swung on to the roof Wait he called to Dave dont tramp around like that You cover up the prints

But Dave s eyes were wild Where is she? he cried. Dido! Dido where are you? He looked about him in the maze of chimney tops electric wires and TV antennae crisscrossing the roof, each with its puddle of shadow She s here he said she s got to be here Garth The prints were going up not down——

Watch out said Garth again let s follow her steps She came this way and now the snow is tramped down—— [illegible]

The sky low w [illegible] the city upon the [illegible] Garth disembodied in thought saw himself at [illegible] Dave s apartment looking out on this very roof at his own figure and Dave—and somewhere around hiding perhaps looking at them maliciously evading them a step ahead of them in the shadows Dido He called her then and stumbled on a wire and cried out then heard himself calling aloud in the darkness and stopped short shocked at the sound of his own voice He bent again and in the half light tried to follow the markings in the snow but they were hopelessly muddled now because in his anguish Dave could not be stopped

Dave he said I must go down His voice shook I ll look around he said He had already gone down a flight when Dave s voice called him back and he raced to the roof again

Look! said Dave Look over there look!

Garth leaned over the snow A heart he said a child s drawing of a heart Dave he read and under the word Dave in smaller letters Dido

I ll get a flashlight he said

It s no use said Dave She s not here.

No cried Garth don t do that Dave He jerked Dave away from the parapet but Dave went back to it leaning half of his body over the ledge until only Garth s grip held him back on the icy surface Dave s voice came to him in spurts in short arterial jets of sound.

I see something he said I see something—out there—on the roof below—Garth no!

Garth was holding him flat on the roof now whipping the shadows with his hands with his arms I ll go down I ll find her Quiet down get on your feet

Dido! cried Dave. He ran down the fire escape climbed on the icy railing and hurled himself on the adjoining roof arms out stretched in the darkness There was a thud and then Garth saw him rise stumbling and run toward the slight dark stain on the snow Garth hesitated a minute then crossed himself and followed after Dave

He bent beside Dave Together they pulled gently at first and then desperately at the slight dead weight which they could not lift. Because the blood from her mouth had run into her hair and into her clothes and hair and clothes were frozen hard into the ice of the roof

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DAVE STULL was in the operating room. Mutely he had fought against Garth who did not want him there Now capped, gowned, masked he was sitting on the stairs leading to the gallery as far as possible from the mutilated thing on the table but still in the same room with her protecting her with his presence defending her with his watchful eye against any possible or impossible carelessness saying wordlessly to Taikkes to Garth to Petra and to Nick, I am here I am watching Look out this is my wife

Yet he could not look at her He had thought he could assist but he could not While he and Garth had placed her on the surgical table put the X ray cassettes under her head then under her chest and her spine and hips he had been steady and controlled, obeying Garth simply as though he were a student not feeling not thinking anything pushing away from his mind all thou hts except those pertaining to the motions he had to make Raising her so that her spine would be neither flexed nor overextended keeping the head from turning to the side cutting the clothes off her body the new dress the flimsy slip the underthings with the blunt side of the cast scissors against her flesh so that he would not nick her H. noted superficially and the thought skimmed off the top of his brain and was gone that the bizarre outline of her right chest was due to the fracture of three and perhaps four ribs that there was undoubtedly a fracture of the nose and perhaps also of the skull, of her knees and hands—yes she must have fallen on all fours, then her head had struck.

The technician handed him the X rays still dripping hypo Garth took them from his hands Better let me have them he said We ll have Dad look at them. He ll know

Let me see said Dave but when Garth walked away with them, he did not follow

He felt a quick spasm of pain when Nick pushed the rubber tubing into her throat and when Dido s face except for the brow and the closed eyes disappeared under the strips holding the tube in place And at the same time there was a perceptible surge of relief as though now that she was covered her face covered her body covered with the sheet it did not hurt any longer it wasn t she any more it didn t have to be Dido It could be it was somebody else a case an accident case anybody s case Mitsu perhaps but not Dido He went to her and pulled the sheet closer draped the screen himself He saw Petra tighten the strips of tape and Stirbu adjust the gaskets of the anaesthesia tanks

Watch out he told Petra in a brittle high voice Her nose is broken Be careful

Petra nodded

It s oxygen you re giving her I hope he said. Not anaesthetic.

No Nick answered I ve got it connected in case she needs a whiff

What are you using?

Nitrous oxide

Petra looked at him her eyes full of compassion You re not going to assist she said. You can t do it You re sick.

I m all right he said in the same dry distant voice Don t start the blood until he tells you.

He walked away picking a path carefully among the wiring and the tubing with which the floor was covered carefully not touching the table nor the instrument trays keeping his eyes averted

barely hanging on to the thin edge of consciousness that he was with Dido sucked deeper and deeper into the same enormous darkness into the same irremediable sleep

Yet his lips were working his voice was coming through. He

Minutes passed and hours lifetimes and epochs And still they went on working using the same routine words that he had used thousands of times before Forceps Hold it tighter Cut please Scalpel the cutting kind Nurse anticipate please Allis forceps Suction Better start that blood now Nurse are you standing on the suction tube? Who the hell is standing on the suction? More oxygen Nick, the blood s too dark Hot packs Don t do that Garth you re pulling too tight boy Relax a bit don t get nervous

And the same noises—the gurgling noises of the vacuum the hissing of the sterilizer the rattling of the instruments and the jerky asthmatic breathing of Taikkes

Taikkes not the boss any more not the Old Man not the teacher but somebody new the magic worker the hero the giant the good kindly giant of the childhood tales the slayer of fears the man who d make her well

She will be well she will pull through, she cannot go like this not tonight not thinking that I hated her She cannot leave like this she cannot die with the marks of my fingers on her face not die because I walked away from her when she was coming to me with all her heart with all her love

Dido Dido save Dido Give me back Dido Let me make it up to her let me make her happy Let me make her live

Once he stood up and dragged himself to the su gical table and then went back quickly to the steps and sat down again Knees drawn up head down on folded rms he surrendered himself to the whirlpool.

Nurse said Taikkes you e standing on the suction tube No? Garth you r standing on the suction tube

Garth lifted his feet carefully and looked down without relaxing his grip on the retractor No he said I m not

Petra come on off it, girl I ve got to see wh t I m doing

'You re standing on it she said It s right under the heel of your left foot

Damn, he said and kicked it w y Now Petra go ar und on the other side will you? I m going to open the pleura I think the

haemorrhage comes from the pulmonary artery That chunk of rib seems to be embedded at right angles I d better clamp it off Blood vessel clamps please

The nurse a student doing nights on Emergency was wide awake but she fumbled. Petra reached across to the tray This, she said It s got a rubber sleeve so the vessel won t be damaged in the clamping

Lectures tomorrow said Taikkes Put it in Garth. No let me Like this Look at the size of this clot will you? The artery is gashed straight through We ll have to cut off a section and get a clean edge

The nurse slapped another clamp into his open palm.

Catch the distal end Garth said Taikkes I ll get this stump in here That s it Now let s lift off the clot entirely and see whether we ve got it all

They bent over it and watched Taikkes touchin the walls of the chest cavity with the forceps-held gauze.

Self sealed said Taikkes Look at that, will you? Pressure from the clot from the very size of the haemorrhage, sealed the tear I ll have to write this up Get that blood going good, Nick. let it flow How many pints do you have?

Two said Nick. They ll bring two more in thirty minutes

We ll be done in thirty minutes or she ll be dead by then.

Father! With a sharp nod of his head Garth indicated Dar collapsed on his step

He s past hearing said Taikkes It s nip and tuck anyway He ought to know You ve got it going good boy?

Yes said Nick.

The pan nurse Petra help me with this gook.

Petra slipped her gloved hands under the coagulated mass which filled both of her palms

Gently now we don t want to go into fibrillation. Oops—easy—the pan Keep the retractors steady Garth I can t get it off this way

The shivering mass was dropped into the pan And then Nick's voice urgent Blood pressure dropping It s dropping fast——

Adrenaline said Taikkes He squeezed the syringe directly into

the heart I don t know—— Procaine Petra keep dripping it straight on Push that blood with the pump Nick.

Nick stood up and started the pumping The heart unsynchronized fought with tripled rate of speed to disengorge itself from the backwash of blood Then it choked and went into a long shiver

Damn it s stopping Nurse the defibrillator

I need her to work the breathing!

Dave the defibrillator

Dave rose his f ce livid.

Work the respirator! Snap into it quick!

Dave seized the balloon and his knees buckling under him sat on the floor pressing the rubber balloon with both hands She s dead she s dead I killed her

The heart blocked then returned to action once more like a wild animal panicked Spontaneously Garth grasped it stroked it steadily evenly steadying its rhythm encouraging its beat without squeezing it through.

I ll sew up that artery said Taikkes Keep out of the way if you can I ll work fast Perspiration rolled off his forehead unnoticed More procaine Petra drop by drop whenever Garth wants it

Now said Garth. The clear drops of fluid fell upon the heart slowing its gallop

The defibrillator s ready said Petra

Connect and stand by

I killed her I killed her moaned Dave

Shut up

We all did thought Petr but she did not s y it

Stop it said Nick to Dave I can take over now Was D ve smiling Was he really smiling? O were his dry lips stuck upon his teeth in a grimace of terror? N k bent toward him and lifted Dave s mask upon his f c quickly You re pressing too hard, he said. She doesn t ne d all of it on each breath.

Breathe her damn it br ath h Dave had said that morning What do you think you re d ing running b cycle pump?

Let me have t, said Nick, I can manage now One ye on

the transfusion going full flow one hand on the temporal artery ... some

sing

her

and

Petra would be all right Had anyone been with Mits[illegible] ... wound
yesterday? Was it her husband or her brother? What was it? He couldn t remember Had anyone been with Mitsu as they were with Dido now anxious eager desperate?

The two bodies on the table coalesced in time and became one. It was as though the day had never been as though with divided consciousness and yet intent in every motion he was reliving in exact detail the morning before the job in which he had failed, in which all of them who were now in the room had failed in various degrees as though with ironical cruelty they were given another chance choosing for a victim not one of those who had sinned by error by negligence by omission but the one who had already suffered already paid for the sins of all the new Mitsu offering herself a second time that they might test themselves again, now to the very limits of their being of their love

The door opened. Petra re-entered the room alone She ripped off her contaminated gloves and took a sterile pair and put them on A little of the talcum fell upon Nick s hands but he did not raise his eyes She spoke but he was deaf to her voice He was, drop by drop measuring the blood entering Dido s veins He was urging the air into her lungs matching her breathing with his own. He was at work

How is she now? asked Petra There were four hands in the open chest wound Garth s moving with every stroke of the heart, and Taikkes massive hands working with flashing dexterity discarding the needle forceps for the surer feel of his own stubby fingers attaching one severed end of the artery to the other between the clamps that withheld the circulation. Petra saw once more, her impatience released into a sort of solemn tranquillity the masterful hand working without a false motion and without a pause in spite of the cramped space Each stroke of the needle biting exactly

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the sam- amount of the vessel s edge each equidistant from the other each equally firm and taut The man with the hurricane temper with the Achillean rages was urging his needle with the same steady control of a tailor pushing his seam as though death was not inhabiting the room preparing the supreme cleavage One suture completed knotted and knotted again Petra clipped off the silk Another suture and a third and another and another Taikkes taking advantage each time for the insertion of the needle into the tough and slippery tissue of the momentary rise of Garth s hand riding the crest of each heartbeat.

Because the sinuous impulse was taking shape Instead of the mute buzzing under his hand it was rising a bit reaching a peak, echoing its own impetus and falling as it should, after the dreadful suspense of its pause and starting again weak, wobbly but of its own motion

Petra saw Garth detach his hand slowly letting it hover above the battered struggling thing unwilling to accept right away the testimony of his fingers For a moment all three of them watched with breath arrested the excursions hesitant but self-created of the resurrected heart Then Taikkes clipped the l st suture

We ll close her up he said Pet a go tell Dave There is a chance She may pull through

He was sitting half sprawled on the cart outside the door the cart which had brought Dido from the entrance to the oper ting room His lips were blue and his face had the grotesque floured pallor of a mime streaked across by the unceasing ploughing of his nails He looked at Petra cringing from her in terror of what knowledge she might bring him

She is all right so far said Petra They are closing th chest. She ll be out of there in a few minutes

She s all right? She ll live?

I think so Dave she said gently Dave you must pull your self together you mustn t give in like this She ll need you soon

He shivered I m cold he said I think she s going to die

No she said don t say that don t think it D ve. She survived a lot. Sh s a tough littl thing

He put his hand across hers Don t he said I m afraid to think——

She took his hand and held it reassuringly urging with all her might some of her warmth and faith into him She ll be all right, she said over and over knowing that the sound of her voice that any commonplace she might utter would soothe him, calm his fears and bring him back to sanity Soon she ll be in her room. You ll be with her you ll see her wake up

She doesn t want to he said as a child protests waiting to be contradicted She doesn t want to live She wants to die She did it herself And if she dies I can t go on I want to be with her I ve got to have a chance—— He shivered again Petra I m afraid of her!

But what happened? she said not caring really guessing too well

It was Mitsu

Mitsu again the unforgiven

No Dave it wasn t Mitsu No more than Taikkes or Nick, or myself——

It was Mitsu he cried Because I killed Mitsu. Because I didn t care She wanted me to know she wanted me to find out I have, he cried all right I ve found out but for what? If she s dying if now her heart has stopped and she is dead——

To break the soil to open it with the sharp edge of pain, if the sod is too dense too tightly grown open it for the love-given seed to give it fruition to make it live to make it bear As she herself unknowingly had borne sorrows that were not hers had given breast to the famished and now had to move away to seek her own fulfilment

Dave she said you must take heart Please brace yourself. Look get up! They are through They want the cart, they re goin to bring her out

32

GARTH WAS alone The door into the room where Dido was resting had been left open and from his station in the hall he could see against the window slowly emerging into light Dave s outline

the jaws had relaxed and the bruised and broken hands not yet encased in plaster but lightly and rapidly cleansed and bandaged were not so rigidly held against the massive dressing of her chest Across from Dave a nurse hurriedly awakened and dressed her cap planted squarely on the quartered and drawn curl pattern of her hair was checking blood pressure and pulse the dials of the tanks and the drip of the intravenous setup

D h d

the tedious hours of the winter dawn he prayed yet the prayer had brought no peace

He was alone in the dreadful aloneness of the unwanted and the mo

before whom the battle occurs holding clasped his useless hands not knowing in the tumult the victors from the vanquished

And yet, under his hand he had left the pulse of life He clo ed his eyes over the remembranc Because it was to him that it had been given to recall that woman from the dead because the gift of life had been placed within his palms to infuse it once more into that f om which life had been withdrawn Another man

Hornsby Sandstrom his father himself would have done as well,
had happened that
hands,
cred to
hold the bread to lift the chalice of eucharistic wine to hold aloft the inanimate substances and have them invested with the ineffable Presence the God self-given unto his mortality I am not worthy Lord *Domine non sum dignus*

Instead of God His creature the least of them the foolish Magdalene the woman who neither believed nor hoped, the sinner of the one unforgivable sin that of despair Not the blood and body of Christ but the vain heart of the self seeker of the publican—this had been placed into his hand this had been the gift and the symbol the command given him the way of life and the answer

All during that night he had been given the opportunity to stop her on the edge of her despair to reach through her confusion, since she was turning to him for an explanation for the meaning of her disgrace but he had not dared He had not known the words he had suffered from human pride he had resented the mockery with which she clothed her need he had lacked the simplicity with which the child of God should look upon his brother he had stayed with her as the brutish bodyguard stays with the witless and the criminal but he had refused to touch the untouchable In the only words she knew she had asked for his help and he had refused not the love of the flesh that he could not offer but the warmth of his heart which had nothing to give.

And God in His patience had given him a second chance, had allowed him, when all was lost, to call her back no longer through the exercise of his judgment nor of his condemnation but with the tedious labour of his hands He had placed her heart in his hand and pulse by tedious pulse permitted him to urge it back from among the dead to life to re-enact the miracle of Lazarus And, at each contraction of his hand his father s hand was beside his own. The gift the command and the symbol The way of life. The answer

He rose and silently entered the room. The nurse turned toward him She shook her head Not yet she said. We'll have to wait a while

Sitting beside the bed, unshaven and haggard, Dave was waiting Silently Garth withdrew

In the monastery chapel his yesterday brothers were kneeling in the arduous reaches of contemplation, each in his separate and particular dedication each, face unseen name forgotten flesh ignored, rising step by step conquering the steep inclines of the sacred mountain. He alone unworthy

'Two men went up into the temple to pray the one was a Pharisee and the other a publican The Pharisee standing prayed thus——

How is she? said Taikkes Have you been in and felt her pulse?

Taikkes had slept an hour and then showered and dressed again From somewhere in the dark kitchens of the hospital food had been brought to him. His breath smelled of coffee If his body resented the fatigue of the night there was no trace of it now on his face. The soldier welcomed the fight. He was strong he looked fit

Her pressure is rising said Garth. Father I think she ll live

She d better said Taikkes We did a good job on that girl. He went into the room and closed the door

——and the publican standing afar off would not so much as lift up his eyes

Taikkes emerged. I think you re right, he said But it will be a long while Dave will have a long stretch of it. Have you seen the X rays?

No said Garth. I don t think I want to Not just now Father

Taikkes stood beside Garth, looking down at his son sitting on the Chinese settee of the hall, his legs stretched before him. Son he said what have I done to you?

What? said Garth. What are you talking about Father?

Yesterday said Taikkes you were happy doing what you wanted nothing much you understand from our po nt of view I mean—that of a scientist—but still what you wanted And today wh t m I m

is it to you? Perhaps you are right son. Forget me Go back

No said Garth. Father do not think of it any more. I am here and I shall stay I have said it before and I say it again. I shall stay

How long? said his father You will be tired of it

Forever said Garth This is my place I know it now

Taikkes sat down beside him. But you were happy there he said. Will you be happy here?

I think she will live said Garth

But if she doesn t They don t always you know

I know said Garth But if she doesn t— He clasped his hands Others will need you Father and need me And we shall try again

His father plunged a hand into his coat pocket Here he said, there was this letter for you Umberto gave it to me last night after you had left

Garth glanced through it and sought the signature From Dr Johnston he said He held it out a little way so that they might both read it together and having read Garth remained silent

Well said his father does that mean anything to you?

No I don t think so said Garth slowly I d have to think about it I am surprised

Bah, said Taikkes Psychiatrists The bunk

Garth smiled Taikkes was himself again, forgettin his own anguish of the past how he himself had turned to Johnston as a last recourse trusting and hoping and how he had won. I don t know he repeated I don t think so Not now

Taikkes eyes were questioning Not now he said When? When I am dead?

Garth stood up No he said not when you re dead, Father When I will have learned Slowly starting from the bottom, opening my eyes listening and learning to speak not defending myself any more as I have always done as I am doing now When I have learned to live.

You re crazy said Taikkes I know it I ve always known it. But that s all right I ll look after you And you will look after me'

The gift the command and the symbol The way of life The answer

33

HJALMAR TAIKKES left the surgeons elevator turned the corner into the lobby and collided with Sirbu Hey you he said

Sorry said Nick then carried by his impetus continued running through the lobby

Hey you repeated Taikkes with force

Nick stopped and turned around

Where are you going at this hour? Taikkes squinted at the clock above the desk and gave up What time is it?

Nearly five o clock, said Nick

Where do you think you are going?

I am driving Petra home said Nick I m going to get her car

Petra! Petra indeed! Listen to him will you? said the old man bellowing to the empty reaches of the hall Listen to that you punk you cockerel you young fish ass you arrogant atrocity un born yet f om your mother s belly! Who do you think you are? Cushing? Charles Mayo? Ochsner or Hjalmar Taikkes?

Sir?

When will you have the decency you young first year squi ts to address the senior attending staff by their proper titles instead of nicknames as though you were speaking to the laundress or the elevator girls? Dr Theodora Petrie to you unlimbed tadpole and don t you dare forget it!

Yes sir said N ck, his blazing bla k eyes fixed upon his chi f in fury And now if I m y go——

And another thing Look t you—no shirt no tie, mangy sweater under your coat Have you no money to buy yourself decen

he asked taking Petra s arm and walking down the steps of th hospital preceded in one bound by Nick, tense again and exasperated I came down in a cab of course I couldn t wake up Miller at that hour and I abominate the smelly things I d rather be taken home in a hearse At least they ride smooth

How do you know? said Petra This is it Here we are. Will you ride in front?

No said Taikkes I ll ride in back with you Take me home first Nick. Tell him where I live Petra I am so tired, I can t talk any more

Seventy Sixth and Park said Petra

She leaned forward from the back seat and put her keys in his hand The fatigue of the night was at last catching up with them What was it she had said the night before? I ve had a hard day I want a bath I want to go to bed and sleep She hadn t had time for much sleep

He Nick felt wonderful He was rising with the sun his brother untouched by fatigue clearheaded and strong *He felt strong to his finger tips strong enough to go through* ten days and ni hts like the last night had been without stopping for sleep without wasting time on stupid love-robbing sleep he felt equal to a ho n l f ll of patients to a dozen Petras *He felt* kindly and [illegible] t Old

[illegible] ne,

[illegible] use

and he d take Petra home He s leave her in the [illegible]

and then later in the day perhaps he d call her up if he had time

Nick where are we going?

Nick woke from his daydreaming with a start. *Home* he said and then recognized where he was

Along the river sir he said It s such a nice sunrise wouldn t you like to watch it coming up?

To hell with the sunrise said Taikkes *When you get to be my age* you ve seen all the sunrises you ever want to see Turn around Doctor and take me home as fast as your wheels will carry you.

Nick made a *U turn on the deserted* drive Dope he said to himself I could have kept that bright idea for later for Petra.

They were talking together now in short unhurried sentences Gossiping quietly like peaceful old women who ruminate each to herself the events of the day before Taikkes reliving step by step the operation on Dido the lesion the broken bones the pierced blood vessel and the extraordinary luck of the massive haemor rhage sealing the puncture because the blood loss was so great it had no place to go and Petra was nodding yes yes it was won derful it was extraordinary yes he had done a superb job yes it would have to be written up yes it had to be seen to be believed Stull was a lucky man

'Yes he is a lucky man and I suppose Garth will talk about miracles said the Old Man with an apologetic laugh But it did seem a miracle really It was touch and go with that girl Even now——

Nick brought the car to a stop before the massive three-storey house.

But she ll live won t she? he said. She won t die now Dr Taikkes?

She ll live sure she ll live said Taikkes don t worry about it tadpole. I am taking him on my service he said to Petra roll ing himself out of the car and helping Petra through the door I think he s the kind I ll get along with I think you are right he s a good boy he s really interested We ll see if we can teach him surgery Stull and Garth and I Come on up I ll feed you some breakfast and you too Nick, you must be starved

He rang the bell and before its peal had ceased the door was opened by Umberto fully dressed and impeccable in his black habit

Umberto get us some breakfast said Taikkes ridding himself of his coat and scarf Scramble ll the egg you e got in the house and find us some h ddock or s me liv r He followed Umberto into the kitchen and w tched him ta t the percolator and break the eggs neatly in the bowl with hands that were firm once more and agile in their wo k

They were alone now but their aloneness was to Petra a con straint and n outrage She s t down in th oom where a few

That s good I like enthusiasm You can t do anything witho t enthusiasm Mackerel Petra? More toast Umberto Nothing worthwhile I was telling that sinister Johnston that psychiatrist, you know the man who was here the other day that enthusiasm is the rarest of qualities among our young men today Look at Garth. Yes I mean it look at him He s always had everything in the palm of his hand so nothing means anything to him any more, he knows it all he understands it all so much so that we all bored him stiff isn t it so Umberto?

Yes sir said Umberto amiably a wide indulgent grin uncovering his strong white teeth

You see even Umberto noticed it And Stull, a frigidaire, an ice plant Poor fellow how fast he crumbled! I wonder what happened really between him and his wife. You spoke to him, didn t you? Did he say anything?

No said Petra I think the girl tried to commit suicide

Naturally she did said Taikkes One doesn t climb on a roof absentmindedly on a night like that But why? Do you want to know why

Why? said Petra forcing herself to listen and to seem interested

Because she s married to an ice plant that s why A man without the quality of enthusiasm that s just what I was telling you. In private life as well as in his profession.

Oh, come now she said Stull s a terrific worker

I did not say he wasn t said Taikkes reaching for the marmalade I only said there is no joy no excitement of discovery no passion in it There s the cold intellectual capacity for work, with the head and with the hands It doesn t proceed from here said Taikkes striking his abdomen with force it does not come from the heart and the entrails I have always said, Stull is a man without entrails Petra and that is a grave handicap to have been born without entrails

I presume you re right she said

You are darned right, I m right, said Taikkes Umberto here would have made a magnificent surgeon When I m through with young Nick I ll start training Umberto Umberto sharpen your

knives one of these days I ll teach you how to carve More coffee please and bring me some hot milk. This milk is cold.

Yes sir said Umberto disappearing

Now Nick has enthusiasm, said Taikkes He has feelings He reacts His face is alive He lives he suffers he collapses he creates H ... I ll make something of him

Yes

But you are not happy though are you? What is the matter Petra? Has something gone wrong I can t tolerate it if something has gone wrong for you I am happy I am so damn happy I

... new ... a new coat, a string of pearls a trip to Honolulu? Tell me please Petra It would give me great pleasure

Don t be absurd Taikker said Petra laughing There is nothing I need And I resent the aspersion on my car It is brand new and I am very p oud of it

And a very good little car it is too said Taikk H ...

t

... ot a man

Would you like to get married gain said Taikkes Do you miss your good man Howard?

Herb said Petra Herb Nichols from Howard I wi h you would stop talking bout my getting married again When I was here the other night you most eloquently told me to go b ck to Herb I said no then and I say no now

And I say all good women should be married said Taikkes with feeling It grieves me to see you without a husband All good surgeons are married the men to women and the wom n to men I don t insist bout Herb he added draining his cup and wiping his lips with vehemence If Herb is a bore look r und.

I ve been propo ed to said Petra almost involuntarily

No doubt you have said Taikkes Anybody I know?

Petra did not answer

Recently? asked Taikkes

Very recently

Not the little boy with the jug ears?

Yes said Petra The little boy with the jug ears

Well said Taikkes Well well well! And he started to laugh He pushed his chair back from the table and laughed and laughing rose from his seat and coming to Petra patted her shoulder Congratulations he said *This is a kill. The femme fatale the cradle snatcher the siren of the kindergarten. Petra, aren t you ashamed of yourself?*

Yes she said I am

You aren t considering him seriously?

Of course not she said

Is he in love with you?

She made a gesture as if to say who knows?

Well he said I liked the boy before now I like him twice as much His taste in women and mine coincide

Please Taikker

Please Taikker he mimicked Can I help it if I like you, and can he help it if he likes you? I tell you what he said drawing his chair beside her and sitting down again you can t marry that boy Petra He is too young for you but you might marry me and then we ll adopt him

That she said is a terrific idea Taikker

That s right he said We ll provide a home for *him.* We'll rub him down we ll smooth his rough corners *I ll give him my* genius for surgery you ll give him your genius for people. Together we ll make a masterpiece

And what about Garth? she asked

Garth? But I ve got Garth out of his monastery and back into the world *He is sincere about it I know he is I am* not going to *him to my apron strings to the strings of my* surgical gown. *I have some sort of an idea he ll find himself* something He has a lead well perhaps it isn t the right one but at any rate he ll think about it.

Taikker said Petra moved by the change in his voice and remembering the man she had tried to console a few nights before, I think that s wonderful. *I m so happy*

But you are not happy no he said I am serious Will you marry me Petra? Will you come to me and stay as long as we both live and until death sets you free? Will you consider it with all your heart? Could you look upon me as a husband or am I ridic ulous too? he added seeing the expression of pain cloud her face Am I ridiculous as the little boy was ridiculous and both for the same reason because he is too young and because I am too old?

Petra turned away from him Why didn t you ask me the other day? she said in so low a voice that he could hardly hear her Why didn t you ask me before I slept with him?

And putting her face in her hands she burst into tears

Taikkes who was about to light a cigar put it down

Did you? he said slowly Did you? Did you have to Petra? He sighed I see he said. I am a fool Yes he repeated it makes sense now He watched her cry silently mopping her tears with the rumpled napkin A fool he said a damned fool

He got up and walked along the room Don t cry Petra he said It doesn t help a bit If you don t like the fellow he ll get over it It doesn t need to spoil anything for him I ll find him another spot You don t need to see him again

She did not answer Tears real tears of embarrassment of self pity of fatigue of exasperation were rolling down her cheeks which she kept mopping with her napkin then giving up she leaned her face against the table and sobbed openly

Taikkes watched her cry feeling more hurt than he thought it possible.

Damn he said damn you Petra stop it will you? Damn you anyway What devil possessed you to get in bed with that punk? Will you stop crying girl will you?

Umberto entered then stood hovering uncertainly besid the table Taikkes waved him way then call d him b ck. Matches he cried Can t you see I have no m tches?

Here said Petra through her sobs lifting to him her f ce tumefied by tears She pushed her lighter toward Taikkes and

t s the
hough

I didn t care about you. I do Good heavens! I tell you I am ready to marry you if you insist but what the devil did you think you were doing a schoolboy practically and an unusually naive one at that! I was here after all if you felt you had to have——

Please Taikker she said. It wasn t that sort of thing at all.

But what was it then? said Taikkes his voice rising in spite of the effort he made at self-control You know perfectly well that you cannot associate with the interns and residents Damn it all, we don t run that sort of a joint at Musurus! No women are allowed in the boys rooms I don t care if they drink and play horse, but you re on the staff after all and what the hell did you think you were doing?

I know it said Petra her face in her hands

Well then!

Well then he repeated after a moment And his age after all You re old enough to be his mother

She did not answer

Did you tell him you were old enough to be his mother?

No said Petra I did tell him the truth. I told him I was thirty seven He said he doesn t care that he wants to marry me

That just goes to show how immature the boy is said Taikkes. That s damn awkward Petra. What am I to do with the boy now?

Nothing said Petra Do what you were going to do anyway I ll get out

The hell you will said Taikkes enraged. You think I d throw you overboard which you deserve anyhow for an unwashed intern with the stink of the dissecting room still about him?

He s a resident, said Petra. He s not a medical student, nor an intern

That s neither here nor there said Taikkes impatiently If you don t want me to do something about it, then you shouldn t have told me That s wrong I ve got some feeling for you, Petra. You ve belonged to me as no other woman ever has I feel very strongly about you I feel—the hell with it! he said turning in his chair so that he had his back to her and was looking moodily toward the window You re the woman for me you re

always been no matter what life did to me, there was always my Petra!

And I was happy now he cried turning violently and striking the table with h f I h f

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stretch of happiness such as it is before me and you have to bring me your asinine affairs with students and your penitent tears What the hell *can* you do about your little man? One thing only I don t want any part of him. You can tell him that for me Let him seek his fortune elsewhere

You don t mean that, said Petra alarmed Don t say that Taikker don t let me interfere with his future

You re damn tooting you are said Taikkes puffing furiously on his cigar You don t expect me to father your lovers do you?

Look said Petra Taikker don t look at it this way I——

What way do you want me to look at it? Did you sleep with him yes or no?

Yes yes yes said Petra her hands rigid in her lap

Taikkes got up He walked up and down the room stopping and glancing down the street from the window Petra s car was at the kerb and in the car Nick So he is waiting for her he thought ragingly He will wait a long time He ll find out what waiting means when the woman is my woman A thought as sudden as a slap brought him back to the t ble Petra he said did you tell Nick about us?

No she said of course not How can you ask?

He shrugged His joined hands behind him he resumed his walk back and forth through the room. The woman w s spent She did not need a scene she needed rest she needed comfo t and kindness She needed the reass rance of a few words of kindness She l ad made her confession and now she wanted to be forgiven He could not let her go like this and h could not find the v o ds nor the gesture It was painful to look at he The sound of the voice the shape of h r lips her hair ven her hair ti ed and dispirited because of the night s work and the night s love w e intolerable to him.

street from its low birthplace in the sky was sharp and bright but brought no warmth Ten minutes after seven. He could wait a few minutes more There was a hip pinning two hours perhaps, a break for coffee then a hysterectomy with Dr Proudfit. That would take care of the morning Petra had a case scheduled that Taikkes was going to do a radical dissection but he was not assigned to that one It didn t matter He d rather not see her during surgery He stretched his cramped legs sideways on the seat and picked up the journal again The anaemia article was a very involved one the classic anaemias which were not classic after all, divisions and subdivisions classifications and subclassifications cases where splenectomy had helped and others where it should have and did not And why The article translated from the Italian, read badly and went on for hundreds of pages He flipped them over and stopped to look at the pictures little dark children with shy faces and enormous protruding bellies where the outline of liver and spleen awkwardly drawn in ink on the tender flesh, demonstrated the pathology And the long studies of the blood pictures column after column of differential blood counts There was so damn much he didn t know His eyes closed again What was Petra doing with Taikkes up there why hadn t she wanted him to have breakfast with the Chief? Why not even a cup of hot coffee? Were his manners bad had he wolfed down his food too rapidly in the kitchen this morning? Had she been displeased? What would Taikkes do should he find out about it? What were they doing there together? Taikkes had wanted him to stay it was she who had put him out Petra Why?

When he woke up he knew The dark suspicion which had been brooding within him the last day and night and which he had had no time or heart to acknowledge made its way through his sleeping will into his mind and stabbed him into consciousness Petra and Taikkes Not his Petra Taikkes Petra. He the man without a woman she the woman without a man Working together knowing each other s life sharing secretly their leftover hours A cry rose to his lips which Nick did not even hear Now—now—now—Now having sent me out now after a night with me Petra with him——

Without knowing what he was doing he jumped out of the car and ran up the steps and as he was pressing the bell the door opened and Petra came out with her everyday face with an every day hat on her head without surprise at seeing him there with her everyday voice saying You should not have waited for me Nick I didn t realize——

Sombrely shaking still he followed her to the car his mind divided between the thing he knew and the woman he saw but the knowledge was more forceful than the fact and he dared not look at her

put the keys in the ign[illegible] I m going home she said Dr Taikkes wants to see you this morning Can you come back to see him?

No he said in such a voice that she turned and looked at him but he did not meet her eyes

What is it Nick? she said a little difference appearing now in her voice a different tone that he did not want to hear a tone almost of alarm of fear But it is impossible she was thinking He doesn t know He is furious because he has waited so long

Will you call him then? she said He wants to talk to you

No said Nick I will not call

She drove on meeting the traffic of the early workers and she did not have to say anything for a moment Then the silence between them grew and becam a chasm. Don t you want to speak to Taikkes? she said after a while because it had to be clarified this thing had to be explored and if possible cleared up and she was in it now There was no backing up Taikkes has some plans for you that he wants to discuss

I have nothing to di us vith him

That was it then He had found out He knew Perhaps the servants? No th serv nts were too discreet to engage in gossip with a stranger even if Nick w re not—— But what d l sl e know about him about his char cter about his backgroun l about the sort of man he was? A harp pang struck deep within her She knew his voice she knew his lov She would never ce se to see.

will make your way without his help If you like what offer I believe he will help you and he has much to give.

And if you stay on and work with him, she thought, t thought touched her only lightly I will have to give him up : not marry him because the lie I am saying is bindin me fo because I will not shatter myself before the boy who loved Even later even in a year or ten years I will not give him the to say she was deceiving me I have been deceived by the I loved

His face was alive now with shattering sorrow and Petra he said please tell me It doesn t matter really I doesn t matter but tell me am I wrong?

She got up She was extremely tired She was tired to She was limp and empty but she had to say it once more having said it she said good bye to the boy she said good him with kindness and emphatically and forever She out of her room Then she showered sluicing herself with letting her hair be drenched and her face and her open ey dressed and called to the housekeeper for the maid. She of the house found her car and started it. And a little be o clock gowned gloved and masked she entered the room